THE FAITH IN FICTION

ALFRED DAVENPORT KELLY, M.A.

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BY

ALFRED DAVENPORT KELLY, M.A.

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CHAPTER I.

STARTING PLACE AND AIMS.

THERE were half a dozen men in the compartment, and the air was thick with smoke and controversy. They had discussed the last strike with its financial results, unrest in India and the League of Nations, the failures of the Church and the claims of spiritualism, the problem of divorce and the pronouncement of the president of the British Association on the nature of the Universe; and now they were turning their attention to the novel that was being boomed in the newspapers and to the educational value of novels in general.

It was at this point that an appeal was made to the silent man in the corner. Putting down his Jane Austen he delivered himself disdainfully in jerky staccato sentences, with interminable pauses in the intervals of lighting and re-lighting his pipe.

"Of course," he said, "I believe in good novels. But the worst of it is that nobody opens them. The cultivated artizan is a myth; business men are no better. Look at the stuff they take with them in a train. Look at the railway bookstalls—they're a wilderness. Look at the Magazines. And in any case you can't get an education out of novels alone; you need serious study as well, and serious study doesn't exist."

The man opposite had just bought the *Strand*, and he felt insulted. Like most of us he was quite ready to run down his compatriots, but he had no intention of running down himself, or of letting anyone else do so.

"I suppose," he said, "that's meant for a hit at me? What do you expect me to study in a train?

Economics?—or history?—or philosophy?—or religion?—or what?"

"Why not?' said the other. "You might do worse. Any way, you could begin on a decent novel." And then he added, "Whether you realise it or not, you've been theorizing about all these things for the last two hours. Theories make a difference to practice. If they don't, they aren't worth discussing. If they do, you should take pains to see that they hold water." Then he muttered, half to himself and half to the company, what the Hatter said to Alice, "If you don't think, you shouldn't talk." After which impertinence the conversation languished.

* * *

The superior person exaggerated when he said that nobody opens a good novel. The classics come out year by year in edition after edition. They are for sale even on the despised railway bookstalls. They are bought and read by the true upper class, the men of good will and good brains—by the capitalist and his clerk, by the university don and the pupil teacher, by the rich man in his castle and the poor man at his gate.

The Eminent Victorians are still studied, and they will continue to be studied when their detractors have had their little day and ceased to be; when the Strands are left high and dry; when Tarzan of the Apes with his sons and grandsons are prehistoric; when King Solomon's Mines have petered out, and the irrepressible She has died for the last time; when the Scarlet Pimpernels have faded; and the fountains of Ella Wheeler Wilcox have ceased to flow. And what is true of the Eminent Victorians is true also of the worthiest of their successors.

I.—THE STARTING PLACE.

If the superior person was unduly pessimistic, some of his ideas were sound. They serve to lead

up to the aims we have in mind, and after discussing them shortly we can take them more or less for granted.

1. To begin with: A man's theory or philosophy of life makes a great practical difference to his character and conduct. (We use these terms in a broad sense to include his guiding principles, his dominant motives, and his ideals.)

No doubt, the Roman poet expressed his own experience when he said, "I see and approve the better course; I follow the worse." But it would be wrong to infer that theories are ineffective. The poet's vision of the right road did make a difference, though he didn't take it. It made him a worse man than he would have been if he had not had that vision—where there is no knowledge of the law there is no sin.

Thus as regards moral theories: If you are convinced that it is quixotic to put yourself out for the sake of your neighbours, you are not likely to be an ardent philanthropist; if your ideal of a good life consists in having a good time, you are not likely to be a devotee of science or politics; if you are sure that it is useless to fight against what is commonly called nature in the sense of your animal nature, you will not set a high value on soberness, temperance and chastity. It is true enough that a Christian may believe in the duty of loving his neighbour as himself, while at the same time he fails to act up to his belief; but at any rate he is in a better position for fulfilling his duty than the man who thinks duty a delusion.

What is true of moral theories is true of theories that are theological and philosophical.

Frederic Myers said that if he were allowed to propound one question to the inscrutable sphinx who can read all the riddles of the Universe, he would ask, "Is the Universe friendly?" That is a philosophical question, but it is a practical question too. If we think of the universe as unfriendly, or

at best indifferent, if we think of human life as "a temporary episode in the purposeless existence of one of the meanest of the planets," our sense of the importance of men's work will die. It may take a long time to die, but theory and practice cannot be kept separate for ever.

2. The next point is that theories of life of some sort or other are held in some way or other by everybody.

On first thoughts the average Englishman may consider this assertion absurd. He detests theories and theorists, has no use for philosophy, and is impatient of principles. It is pure paradox to charge him with holding a philosophy of life.

During the war, he did indeed make vociferous appeals to principle when for propaganda purposes he was anxious to justify himself and discredit his enemies. But in his heart he agreed with the M.P. who rapped out, "It is our business to win the war, and the less we trouble about principles the better."

On second thoughts, however, the objector may admit that the average man differs from the philosopher, not in being destitute of philosophic theories, but either in holding them subconsciously, or in not making it his business to think them out systematically. What Sir Oliver Lodge says is true:

> "Philosophy has more influence on conduct than is supposed, though it may not be known by that name. People may imagine that they have no philosophy of life, but unless they are drifting casuals they must have one, though its formulation is a subject for professors."

The fact that a theory is unformulated and subconscious does not make it less influential than theories of which we are fully aware. Subconscious prejudices, for instance, may be invincible prejudices. They are not less obstinate nor less potent for good and evil because men disown their existence.

3. Now we come to the third and last of these introductory points: It is the task of fiction to deal with theories of life; to bring out what they are and what they do—in other words, to throw light on their nature and their influence.

"Might is right; a man must live; and the devil may take the hindmost": that is the motto of the average villain; of Bill Sikes the burglar, of Sir Mulberry Hawk the adventurer, of Quilp the dwarf, of Squeers the schoolmaster, and of all the ignoble army of selfish people pictured for us by Dickens and his successors. Even Sir John Chester, who disliked thinking because thinking makes wrinkles, was not an exception to the rule that men act on a theory. His guiding principle was to have no guiding principle, and that in itself is a philosophy of life.

So much for the villains; we can say the same for their companions and their victims. "You must draw the line somewhere; there are things no decent person will do": here you have the theory for which Nancy and Lord Verisopht risked their lives and lost them. Fiction follows fact. The M.P., mentioned a few lines back, if he was consistent with himself (a big "if"), had guiding principles though he professed to set them on one side. Victory at any price, that was his watchword; victory first, duty second—just the principle he condemned in his invectives against the German Government with its "scrap of paper" estimate of Belgium's neutrality.

Theories may be so vague that at first sight they might as well be non-existent. "I don't hold with the Church," said the cobbler, "but of course I believe in a supreme Being—and the likes of that." It is not probable that the cobbler's faith was of much advantage to him; but it is highly probable that it did him a good deal of harm. Better have no belief at all, than have one and not take it seriously.

What we have said holds true, and the novels endorse it: everybody has a theory of life, and his theory makes a practical difference for good or evil.

II.—AIMS.

Interpretation and criticism—these two words will serve to sum up the chief aims of this book.

(1). It attempts to interpret what novelists teach, directly or indirectly, about the theories of life current among us.

(2). It criticizes these theories, asking how far they are true, and how far their influence is good or bad.

This short statement needs expanding and justifying.

1. We begin with the work of interpretation. All day long we inhale a mental atmosphere of which the teaching of fiction forms a part. It is vital that we should examine it, just as scientists examine the water that we drink. Otherwise our minds are formed unconsciously, and may easily be formed on wrong lines—we are poisoned without knowing it. And this is an indignity added to an injury.

Sometimes, bored by reviews and reviewers, we urge that authors should be allowed to speak for themselves, that a good novel does not need an interpreter—it interprets itself.

But this attitude is the result of a mood; it does not represent our real mind.

Novels are not systematic, philosophical treatises. They bring out moral and religious principles, not by scientific formulæ, but by hints and suggestions contained in conversations and incidents, or by the plot of the story taken as a whole. Often what they omit is as significant as what they say; and often the author himself is not fully aware of his own point of view. Consequently, in fiction, it is easy to miss the underlying principles, just as it is easy to miss them when we deal with real characters in real life. Again, we all talk to our friends about the books we read, and this is an admission that we are interested in what they say, and that we have something to learn from them. If we are in debt

to our friends, we are still more indebted to great thinkers, critics, and commentators—to men like Ruskin, for instance—who can appreciate the best literature better than we can. It would be absurd to force each generation to start afresh by throwing away the accumulated experience of the past, whether in the sphere of philosophy, science or fiction.

And then further: even supposing that good novels expressed their principles with perfect lucidity, there are many novels in the world and many different principles expressed in them. Here the interpreter finds his place. He tries to bring these principles together, to classify them, and to show how they are like or unlike each other. By doing this he enables us to form a better notion of the tendencies prevailing at the present day.

2. Secondly, as to the work of criticism. When we have systematized and interpreted the teaching of the novelist we go on to criticize it, asking how far this teaching is true, and how far its influence is a good influence.

An attempt of this sort is needed. Fiction by itself is not fitted, in Plato's phrase, to be the raft that will float us over the ocean of the unknown; and there is a tendency to estimate its value for this purpose too highly.

Casual people, and, intellectually, most people are casual, are under the impression that they can pick up a working theory of life from conversation in the club or the drawing-room, or from the newspaper, especially if, like the *Times*, it contains a weekly sermonette. Even people, who are not at all casual, imagine, if we may judge from their practice, that good fiction will settle their difficulties as to the great problems of human existence.

"Is it possible," they ask, "after the horrors of the war to go on believing in God?"

Mr. Britling will see them through.

Or again: "Is it right to try to get into touch with friendly spirits on the other side?"

The necromancer's experiences described by Hugh Benson will warn them off the unhallowed ground. The attempt must not be made; it can result only in contact with devils. That is Benson's verdict. It is endorsed by the panic of the cats on the leads when the séance drew to its climax. The cats at any rate were under no delusion as to what sort of spirits were materializing themselves in the necromancer's room.

"Can a High Church Bishop be saved?" "No," says Marie Corelli; "not unless he repents quickly, and takes the advice of God's good man, the candid clergyman of his Diocese, and goes back once more to the 'old-fashioned Morning Prayer' and abolishes the 'new-fangled Mattins,' which he has substituted for it in 'his' Cathedral." (The author seems to have got it into her head that these two titles stand for two different services; or did she think that Mattins is identical with Mass?)

The local magnate who attended the village debating society took a similarly optimistic view of the influence of light literature.

"A good novel," he said, "is worth half a dozen sermons. In these days of universal education we do not depend on oral instruction from the pulpit, nor do we need a priest to give us individual spiritual direction. We have access to the libraries, and the novels will give us all the direction we need."

The sarcastic member followed, and he drew a moving picture of a poor soul in search of guidance, wandering round the novels at Boots' or Mudie's. "He is baffled by their numbers at first, but he lights at last on *The Heavenly Twins*, by Sarah Grand, and carries it off in triumph exclaiming, 'This must be just the book I want. It is a book about Heaven, and it will show me how to get there.'"

"Few civilized nations," says Professor Zimmern in his *Nationality and Government*, "are so undiscriminating as the British in their mental appetite";

and Gissing's novel *Demos* has a pathetic description of an agitator's little library of well-thumbed books, all of them as dead as Queen Anne. The drawing-room and the club are as bad as the workshop. Thousands, who would not waste one glance on a report issued by the whole bench of Bishops, swallow Wells, Conan Doyle, or Marie Corelli, with solemn gusto.

Novels by themselves will not see us through. Men cannot choose the best books by the light of nature; and even if they could, additional study may help them to make better use of what they read. Hence the value of a little serious philosophy, of critical reviews, and, let us hope, of the present book.

CHAPTER II.

POPULAR MORAL IDEALS.

HUXLEY said once in his trenchant way that Englishmen, though they were not particularly moral or particularly religious, were "infernally sentimental." A recent writer is more optimistic, declaring that "the Englishman is profoundly ethical," and that morality is the outstanding feature of his character. On behalf of his contention we might point to the high place accorded to duty in Tennyson's poems, and to the big words of big men, handed down through the generations, like those of Henry Lawrence, "I tried to do my duty," and Nelson's Trafalgar signal. The cheerful irreverence of the modern version—"England expects every tank to do its damndest"—does not alter the sense or make the sentiment any less real.

It is easy to make sweeping generalizations about national character; it is another matter to make them with even an approach to the demands for scientific proof. There is, however, one point on which we can agree, and that is as to the almost universal attraction felt for the ordinary, homely virtues.

Donald Hankey points this out in a frequently quoted passage in his *Student in Arms*:—

> "The soldier, and in this case the soldier means the working man, does not in the least connect the things that he really believes in with Christianity. He thinks that Christianity consists in believing the Bible and setting up to be better than your neighbours. By believing the Bible he means believing that Jonah was swallowed by the whale. By setting up to be better than your neighbours he means not drinking, not swearing,

and preferably not smoking, being close-fisted with your money, avoiding the companionship of doubtful characters. They believe in the Christian virtues of unselfishness, generosity, charity, and humility, without ever connecting them in their minds with Christ; and at the same time what they do associate with Christianity is just on a par with the formation of smug self-righteousness which Christ spent His whole life in trying to destroy."

We get the same impression from Dickens; and, although he wrote a couple of generations ago, he represents the popular mind of our own day as well as of his own. He knows that the biggest toughs in Hounsditch hiss the villain off the stage, and that songs about Home and Mother are the songs they like best—they are the songs he liked best himself. He means you to laugh at his comic blackguards, but he does not mean you to laugh with them; while as to his melodramatic blackguards, Ralph Nickleby, Jonas, and the like, they repelled him as much as they did his readers. On the other hand he has a genuine admiration for the homely virtues, for the cheerfulness generosity and charity, mentioned by Donald Hankey, for an easy-going good-nature and amiability, combined with "a respect for respectability," and an avoidance of the grosser forms of selfishness, dishonesty and sensuality. Human nature changes in a sense; the spirit of one age may differ from the spirit of another age; but there is "a Spirit of the Ages" which, like the main features of the popular ideal, remains the same.

The attractiveness of this homely ideal is acknowledged even by people who, like Becky Sharpe, never try to act up to it. Her mixed feelings on leaving Queen's Crawley are a case in point.

"... 'How happy you will be to see your darling little boy again,' Lady Crawley said, taking leave of her kinswoman.

> "'Oh, so happy,' said Rebecca, throwing up her green eyes. She was immensely happy to be free of the place, and yet loth to go. Queen's Crawley was abominably stupid; and yet the air there was somehow purer than that which she had been accustomed to breathe. Everybody had been dull, but had been kind in their way. 'It is all the influence of a long course of Three per Cents,' Becky said to herself, and was right very likely."

Thus vice, before passing into the wilderness, pays its homage at the shrine of virtue, while it tries to justify itself by disparaging what it adores. In spite of Thackeray's suggestion about the "Three per Cents," natural affection is a virtue, and the absence of it is a vice, though both may be largely due to circumstances; otherwise we could call no one good unless he had been brought up badly, and no one bad unless he had been brought up well.

Devotees of Becky swear that Lady Jane, Amelia, Dobbin, and Rawdon are all fools; that Rawdon, in spite of his sentimental fondness for his boy, is a fool and knave combined; and that first, last, and all the time, they are in love with Becky and with Becky alone. But Rawdon's kindness cannot be damned as mere sentiment. To be a "nice" person, as some moralists are keen on pointing out, is not everything; but nothing will excuse Becky or any one else from being as kind, as agreeable, yes, as "nice," as they can be to their kith and kin, to their friends and acquaintances.

A passage in Jane Austen's *Persuasion* bears on the same point. Anne Elliot's rejected suitor is described as an unsatisfying person, for although "he was rational, discreet, polished, he was not open; there was never any burst of feeling, any warmth of indignation, or delight in the evil or good of others." Hosts of religious and respectable people suffer from a disproportionate zeal for the cultivation of their own characters at the expense

of a natural healthy affection for the people they live with. Many of them are made irritable by the strain of observing rules; others, satisfied with keeping one set of rules, dispense themselves from the rest, and become habitually discourteous, disrespectful, and offensive. Others, again, are entirely correct in their conduct, and display a real interest in the welfare of their acquaintances. But the crust of their professional kindliness hides a most un-Christian "detachment," a superhuman, inhuman, or sub-human indifference to personal intimacies, which makes them less attractive than their worldly, easy-going, good-natured contemporaries. In their company you may be as solitary as in the Sahara, and they give men an excuse for seeking their friends outside the household of the faith, where the best friends should be found.

In Conan Doyle's *Round the Red Lamp* there is a story of three doctors—let us call them Jones, Brown and Robinson.

Old-fashioned Dr. Jones has won the confidence of the country-side, not by any special display of skill, but by his genuine individual interest in every patient who comes under his hands.

Doctors Brown and Robinson, fresh from the Schools and brimming over with the latest methods, establish themselves in the neighbourhood, and both agree that old Jones is a fossil.

Then Brown gets ill. After a sharp mental struggle he finds he really can't bring himself to be fingered by young Robinson, and he sends his servant for the fossil. A note comes back. "Dear Dr. Brown, I am sorry to be delayed, but I will come as soon as I can. Dr. Robinson has had an accident, and he has sent me an urgent message to attend him. Yours, etc., M. D. Jones."

CHAPTER III.

POPULAR MORAL IDEALS *(continued)*: DEVOTION IN EMERGENCIES.

"No virtue," says the author of *Ecce Homo*, "is safe unless it is passionate," and we may add, unless it involves a high degree, not only of feeling, but also of resolution. Here we have taken a step in advance; we have arrived at the ideal of devotion and self-surrender, disinterested, unreserved, at all costs.

The popular ideal, as we have seen, includes good nature, kindness, amiability, and all that goes to make up the homely virtues. In moments of emergency—we can hardly say more than that—the ideal of devotion is recognized also. In such moments the ordinary man is convinced that devotion is not only admirable, but essential. He is convinced that the soldier who faces death is a hero (though, rather inconsistently, if the soldier runs away, he calls him a coward); he is convinced also that the soldier is not engaged in a work of supererogation, but that what he does he is morally bound to do.

The novel of adventure takes the same line. It rings the changes on risks and hardships suffered to save the existence of a woman, a comrade, a man's clan, or his country. Hence the unchanging appeal of the storm scene in *David Copperfield*, when Emily's lover makes two desperate attempts to rescue the man who has betrayed him and her.

> "He was hurt. I saw blood on his face, from where I stood; but he took no thought of that. He seemed hurriedly to give them some directions for leaving him more free—or so I judged from the motion of his arm—and was gone as before.
>
> "And now he made for the wreck, rising with

the hills, falling with the valleys, lost beneath the rugged foam, borne in towards the shore, borne on towards the ship, striving hard and valiantly. The distance was nothing, but the power of the sea and wind made the strife deadly. At length he neared the wreck. He was so near that, with one more of his vigorous strokes, he would be clinging to it—when a high, green, vast hill-side of water, moving on shoreward, from beyond the ship, he seemed to leap up into it with a mighty bound, and the ship was gone!

" Some eddying fragments I saw in the sea, as if a mere cask had been broken, in running to the spot where they were hauling in. Consternation was in every face. They drew him to my very feet—insensible—dead. . . .' his generous heart was stilled for ever.' "

The same point is drawn out in Hugh Walpole's *Mr. Perrin and Mr. Trail*. The uniform drabness of the rest of the book is atoned for by the conclusion. Perrin, cut off from self-fulfilment at " Moffatt's "—a particularly atrocious private school—,half out of his mind, and obsessed by envy, hatred, malice, and all uncharitableness towards his popular colleague Trail, sets out to kill him. There is a struggle, Trail falls over a cliff, Perrin finds him unconscious, and at the price of his own life saves him from the incoming tide. Before he dies he has time to think:

". . . He thought . . of the way he had hated Trail, of the meanness and spite and petty anger. Was everyone made of so many different people, had everyone such base things, such miserably little things, to account for?

" But now at last he was justified. No one would ever know—Trail would never know. . . . But God, the God against whom he thought he had been playing his game, God knew.

" Was it, he wondered, odd that he, who had intended during all these weeks to kill Trail,

should now be giving his life for him? No . . . it was not really odd. . . . He was not a big enough character to kill anyone . . . It was much easier to die for someone. All he had ever needed in life was a justification—a reason why he, Vincent Perrin, should exist at all—and it was because Moffatt's had robbed him of that justification that he had hated it so. Now he was justified."

It was Perrin's own fault that made the sacrifice necessary, and the repentance came late enough no doubt; still, both the sacrifice and the repentance were real. If he was condemned by what he did, he was acquitted by what he suffered.

CHAPTER IV.

HABITUAL DEVOTION.

PERRIN was right; it is easier to die for people than to live for them. Yet if one is necessary, so is the other; the duty of devotion at critical times involves the duty of habitual devotion at all times.

This point is vital, and it must be emphasised. We see plainly enough the truth underlying the irony of Clough's neat couplet:

> "Thou shalt not kill, but need'st not strive
> Officiously to keep alive."

If you must not murder your neighbour, neither must you let him die by your neglect. On the same principle, if it is a duty to save life, it is a duty to make life worth saving. A man's welfare or a country's welfare is no less important than its preservation. We need the martyr who performs a devoted action; we need as well the saint with his course of habitual good actions, whose devotion or heroism is not less because it is spread over a long period.

Unfortunately, the popular ideal stops short with the homely virtues plus the need of occasional devotion in times of emergency. If it were not so, England would be as strenuous in trying to make a success of the peace as it was strenuous in making a success of the war.

Yet the ideal of habitual devotion, if it is not widely prevalent, is not altogether neglected; and its attractiveness is felt even by those who have no intention of making the ideal their own.

Dickens, for instance, has given us, not only the Pickwickian amiability, the irrepressible cheerfulness of Mark Tapley, and the self-sacrifice of Sidney

Carton, but the picture of Nell's life-long devotion to her grandfather—a picture spoiled by a riot of sentiment that has run to seed and degenerated into sentimentality. He has given us Sam Weller's loyalty to his master in the Fleet, and Betsy Trotwood's care for David Copperfield and poor mad Dick, immortalized by an undercurrent of sound sense and humour. Best of all is Peggotty's pilgrimage in search of the daughter who has ruined her home and herself.

So again in the one considerable novel written by Mrs. Francis Burnett, *Through One Administration*. There is Bertha, the brilliantly successful society woman, and there is the other Bertha, the same and not the same, doing her best for a conscienceless husband, and for his sake letting herself be mixed up in the seamy side of American politics; the mother devoted to her children, and saying, " I'm not a religious woman; but I think if anything were to happen to them, it would tear my heart strings out."

It is the dimly realized existence of this ideal that makes ninety-nine novels out of a hundred centre round a courtship and end in a happy marriage. Crude as they may be, they bring out the fact that once in their lives men and women have their romance, a romance during which they are thinking of somebody else first, and which just for that reason raises them to a higher status. It is that mutual devotion which is meant to form, and often does form, the foundation of a wider unselfishness, leading them on to wish that all the world could know the secret that has made their own lives worth living.

George Eliot puts this feelingly when she writes of Adam Bede's love for Dinah.

> " ' It's like as if it was a new strength to me,' he said to himself, ' to love her, and know as she loved me. I shall look t' her, to help me see things right. For she's better than I am—there's

less o' self in her, and pride. And it's a feeling as gives you a sort o' liberty, as if you could walk more fearless, when you've more trust in another than y' have in yourself. I've always been thinking I knew better than them as belonged to me, and that's a poor sort of life, when you can't look to them nearest to you t' help you with a bit better thought than what you've got inside you a'ready.' "

There are times when good people with all their devotion and charity pall on us: we complain that they are so dreadfully sentimental, so stupid, and so plentifully lacking in wit and humour. At such times Mrs. Macnaughtan's book *The Four Chimneys* comes in to rebuke our cynicism. Barbara Leslie was all these dreadful things; she was sentimental, unintellectual, and she could not see a joke. But in heaven's name, what did it all matter? Her total absence of self-consciousness made her everybody's confidant; she was the friend of all her little world; and the village where she played the Lady Bountiful worshipped the hem of her garment. Her very simplicity gave her a dignity and a strength which all the clever people in her circle admitted and admired, gladly and without jealousy. They could criticize her foibles easily enough, but none of them would have dared to think that their cleverness made them her superiors. Her character survives the loss of her fortune, and the understanding Mrs. Meredith, speaking of the "belief held once in 'shining saints'—a title given to men and women who worked with a certain radiance on their faces"—has good reason to say that she will always look on Barbara as "a triumphant woman." So some friend watching old Bishop Dupanloup taking part in a long—very long—service in the Nôtre Dâme, said, "A flame like that does not grow weary."

CHAPTER V.

DEVOTION TO CAUSES.

In a story called *A Human Document*, by Mallock—an exceptionally clever and versatile writer—the hero is made to criticize the dominance of the love interest in the ordinary novel. In this particular novel the love interest has its revenge, for the hero in spite of his views is entangled with a woman, and for her sake gives up his career. But Mallock is right in suggesting that absorption in business is as frequent as absorption in love.

Then there is a big minority of men who devote themselves disinterestedly to higher ends than their own advancement:— to social, political, artistic, scientific, or religious ideals, and, perhaps, to the party or organisation or system by which these ideals are served. In such cases we have examples of what we may call devotion to a *cause*, in distinction from devotion to the welfare of individuals. It is true that devotion of this sort benefits a large number of individuals, but the man who displays the devotion is not thinking primarily of the individuals; it is the ideal, the party, the system, in a word, the cause, that he has at heart. This distinction is not easy to define accurately, but it is plain enough for practical purposes.

Devotion to persons, right and necessary as it is, needs supplementing by devotion to a cause.

The absence of this form of devotion from Dickens, and for the matter of that from the majority of popular novels, is the more striking when we remember how often it is present in actual life.

Consider, for instance, the Victorian era.

Livingstone and his African adventures were

talked of everywhere; Dickens represents missionary enterprise by Mrs. Jellaby.

Shaftesbury was a household word; Dickens' idea of a philanthropist is the converted Scrooge doubling the pay and coal rations of his clerk.

The dæmonic energy of Florence Nightingale was making order out of chaos in our hospital system; in Dickens the nursing profession is exemplified by Mrs. Gamp.

Arnold of Rugby was laying the foundations of the modern public school; Dickens gives us Squeers and Blimber.

Mackonochie was slaving in the London slums; there is no slum priest in the London of Dickens.

Lastly, there was Dickens himself, red hot against social abuses; but there is not a Dickens in all the gallery of portraits that Dickens painted—not a single sympathetic description of anyone who made it his business, as Dickens himself did, to be the champion of the oppressed against the oppressor. He was enthusiastic for reform, but it was out of his power to draw for us an enthusiastic reformer.

Still, what we miss in Dickens we find elsewhere.

The catechist in Stevenson's *Kidnapped*, moralizes well to David Balfour about the fine generosity of the Highlanders. In spite of their poverty and of the grinding taxes extracted from them by an alien Government, they send regular supplies to their banished chiefs, partly from fear, but largely from real affection and clan loyalty; and though there is a price on the head of the agents who organize the supplies, these agents are never betrayed.

> "'It's wonderful,' he said, 'where the tenants find the money, for their life is mere starvation. . . . But these tenants are doubtless partly driven to it . . . James Stewart is a man much looked up to, and drives very hard. And then there's one they call Alan Breck . . . His life is forfeit already; he would boggle at næthing, and, maybe,

if a tenant-body was to hang back he would get a dirk in his wame.'

"'You make a poor story of it all,' said I. 'If it is all fear on both sides, I care to hear no more of it.'

"'Na,' said he, 'but there's love too and self-denial that should put the like of you and me to shame. There's something fine about it; not perhaps Christian, but humanly fine . . . There's many a lying sneck-draw sits close in kirk in our own part of the country, and stands well in the world's eye, and maybe is a far worse man, Mr. Balfour, than yon misguided sheeder of man's blood. Ay, ay, we might take a lesson by them.'"

Like the Oxford of Macaulay, the Highlands were "the home of lost causes and impossible loyalties," and they formed a poignant contrast to the colder English governing classes who prided themselves on being so much more respectable, so much more civilized, and so completely free from the "enthusiasm" which the writers of their day regarded as the greatest of the deadly sins. It is true that they used the word in the sense of fanaticism. They did not condemn the idea of enthusiasm in the sense the word bears to-day. But they did not condemn the idea, because they did not possess the idea. They saw no mean between the fanaticism they abhorred and the quiet selfishness they cultivated. It was a symptom of the period that Butler, the great champion of Christianity, in defending his two fundamental principles, duty and conscience, puts beside them the principle of "cool self-love," and takes pains to commend his message by showing that the claims of these principles cannot be in conflict.

At the end of the period romance was coming into its own, but the older attitude took a long time to die. The solid or stolid "sense" of Jane Austen's heroine could make nothing of the "sensibility" of the younger sister who went into raptures over woods

in autumn:—"It is not everybody who can see so much in dead leaves as you do." Sensibility, in morals as in art, meant sentimentality if it did mean fanaticism, and to the man of affairs devotion to a cause, especially to an unsuccessful cause, was positively repulsive—it was the offence of the Cross.

Disraeli and Charles Kingsley were both of them keenly alive to the evils of the industrial system and the need of reform. Disraeli was a sphinx, and it is impossible to tell how deep his sympathy went; but in Kingsley's case social service was a passion, and he preached what he practised. If, unlike modern Christian socialists, he did not desire government by the people, he did desire government for the people—government controlled by a benignant and fatherly aristocracy of the class to which he himself belonged. Devotion to the welfare of the people as a whole was an outstanding feature of his moral ideal.

Kipling gives us the wider view of devotion, although he has critics who think his ideals both blatant and exclusive. Chesterton, for instance, believes that the mid-Victorian aristocrats would have regarded his imperialism as vulgar. Wells accuses him of militarism and of contempt for democracy; he suggests that the story in which Stalky and his friends torture the school bullies into a state of abject harmlessness, is a glorification of organized brutality, and a defiance of the rights of the individual, typical of the aristocratic public school tradition.

However this may be, Kipling has got beyond the narrow ideal that consists solely in devotion to persons; he has a fine appreciation for work done for work's sake, and for the individual who subordinates himself to his work. He sides with his own "William the Conqueror," the girl who says "I like people who do things," the girl who is glad that her lover in the thick of his famine relief occupations hasn't gone a mile out of his way to see

her, and who chatters to him interminably about his canals and bridges—"their idea of spooning, I suppose," as the head of the department suggests.

In the romantic realism, or realistic romance, of Wells, we find the same degree of interest in causes, but we are a long way removed from the standpoint of the older writers. Like Dickens and Kingsley, he is horribly indignant with the abuses of the social system, but what he has chiefly in mind is the system itself, a civilization that seems to him, perhaps, as it does to Mr. Conrad Noel, "a loathsome travesty of the Christian religion." This notion of a rotten system, taken advantage of by the bad, bolstered up unconsciously by the good, and involving the bad and the good alike in its fall, is a notion that we read between the lines, all through the writings of the prophets of the Old Testament.

CHAPTER VI.

DEVOTION AND DUTY.

THERE are leaders of thought in our generation who tell us that the notion of duty has lost the pride of place which it occupied in Victorian times. After Stevenson's picturesque Highlanders and the far flung line of Kipling's imperialists, with their spontaneous enthusiasm for their clan or their cause or their work, the ideal of duty seems cold, stilted, and unattractive. It savours of Boards of Guardians and Charity Organization Committees, efficient, no doubt, but relentlessly efficient, hard and inhuman. Wellington in his despatches, harped on duty; he never mentioned glory. Napoleon appealed to glory alone, and, as Conan Doyle's stories bring out well, he had his reward; he was loved, while Wellington was feared and respected. In many cases, men who make duty their god, are not even respected; they are essentially self-centred and priggish.

For reasons of this sort, some of the characters in E. F. Benson's *Sheaves*, fight shy of the word duty, and disparage it as a motive. Yet they can see something in the ideal, critical and suspicious of it as they are. The hero, in spite of the fact that he sings divinely, in spite of good offers from good companies, and in spite of the persuasions of Reuss, his famous master, refuses resolutely to become a professional.

> "'You owe Reuss a great deal,' said Edith; 'everyone who hears you sing owes him a great deal.'
>
> "'But I don't want to,' said Hugh, as if that quite settled the matter."

(His friends, however, are not content):—

"'I really think,' said Edith, 'that there is a moral duty attaching to a gift like that.'

"'I know,' said Peggy, 'but the worst of it is that that is just the argument one cannot use to Hugh .... He is absolutely free from self-consciousness. And your argument, though undoubtedly a true one, suggests self-consciousness. Oh, I hate the word 'duty' even! To say that a thing is one's duty implies that one is thinking about oneself, though, no doubt, from most excellent motives and for the sake of other people.

"'But when you get a boy like Hugh, whose huge kindly instincts take the place of duty, it would really be like corrupting him to suggest that he had duties, or that talents were given him for reasons.'"

A few pages further on, we come across Canon Alington, who is a prig, and his two children, who are being faithfully trained to follow their father's footsteps.

"'The two children,' said their father, 'vie with each other in kindly deeds. The boy gave all his strawberries for the day to a sick woman. It was entirely his own idea too. He asked me if he might.'

"'I should have told him not to jaw, but eat them himself,' said Hugh, in a sudden access of internal revolt.

"Canon Alington looked at him for a moment in silence.

"'I fancy it is time for us to dress,' he said tactfully."

Yet in the end Hugh accepted Reuss's offer, and, after all, the notion of duty had something to do with the acceptance. The sight of the crowded theatre when Andrew Robb's play was performed, made him feel that Edith was right when she had said, "What a wonderful thing it must be to impress yourself on other people."

"'I begin to see,' he said, 'what Reuss meant by its not being fair on him. For suppose Andrew, capable of writing that play, had not done so, how rightly indignant we should have been . . .'"

No, on the whole, the disparagement of duty does not rest on good grounds. We have not space to dwell on the argument at length, but it is important, and it is well worth summing up in a few short sentences.

To begin with, the man who does his work for duty's sake may be priggish, but his motive is not necessarily a priggish or selfish motive. His work may give him the pleasure of a good conscience, but he is not acting *for the sake* of that pleasure. His good conscience depends on his work being disinterested. If it is not disinterested—if he is working for pleasure, even for the refined pleasure of feeling he has done right—why, then, the pleasure is not forthcoming. If his critic could persuade him that he was working for pleasure only, then it would be sensible for him to stifle his conscience—not a difficult thing to do—and to get his pleasure in less burdensome ways. The pleasure of work is one thing; working for pleasure is another.

In the next place, the man who thinks he is working for duty's sake may be working for a selfish motive—for the sake of feeling himself superior. But we may say the same of the enthusiast. It is a very good thing that the enthusiast likes his work, but if he does his work *because* he likes it and *as long as* he likes it, that is a very bad thing, not true devotion at all. Liking what you do is one thing; doing what you like is another.

Thirdly, the contrast commonly drawn between a "spontaneous enthusiasm" and "a sense of duty" is a false contrast. The two things may go together. Devotion to duty may be an enthusiastic devotion, and it may be the support without which a natural enthusiasm breaks down in times of difficulty. Critics,

as we have seen, compare Wellington's appeals to duty with Napoleon's glorification of glory—to the disadvanatge of the former; but they forget that there was a person called Nelson, who appealed to both, who was loved as well as respected, and who might be respected still more if his sense of duty had restrained the sentimental effusions of his private life.

Tennyson's "Not once or twice" and Nelson's Trafalgar message, in which duty is put in the forefront, may leave us cold, but they did not leave Tennyson or Nelson cold; at any rate, if Tennyson was artificial, Nelson was not.

Certainly, it is a sense of duty that makes some of the finest characters in real life and in fiction. Thus, Evan Harrington's mother in Meredith's novel, does not talk much about duty, but when her husband is dead she insists austerely that the son, whom he had educated as a gentleman, shall come back to the village and work in the tailor's shop to pay off his father's debts. Perhaps she was acting from self-respect—a form of pride; but then perhaps she wasn't—there is no need to assume a lower motive because the evidence for the higher one is not conclusive.

When Jeanie Deans refused to perjure herself to secure her sister's safety she acted on principle, but no one would accuse her of being a prig. She was not thinking of herself as a heroine; she was not aiming at being a heroine; she was not thinking of herself at all. She acted from reverence for a law outside her and above her.

Walter Scott himself, Jeanie's creator, worked for ten years at forced draught to pay off debts incurred by his publishers through no fault of his own. His biographer has quoted his last words which fit his actions well: "Be a religious man; be conscientious; be in earnest; be religious." Is the sentiment Victorian—pre-Victorian? Maybe; but it is not priggish.

Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre* finds that her lover is already married to a mad wife. She wishes to stay with him. Passion under the guise of love could find a hundred reasons for doing so. Principle stands in the way, and she knows and resolves that passion is to be forced under.

> "I will hold to the principles received by me when I was sane and not mad, as I am now. Laws and principles are not for the times when there is no temptation: they are for such moments as this, when body and soul rise in mutiny against their rigour; stringent are they; inviolate they shall be. If at my individual convenience I might break them, what would be their worth? They have a worth, so I have always believed; and if I cannot believe it now, it is because I am insane—quite insane: with my veins running fire, and my heart beating faster than I can count its throbs. Preconceived opinions, foregone determination, are all I have at this hour to stand by: there I plant my foot."

In spite of the stiff Victorian style, it is not likely that Charlotte Bronte was influenced by any wish to make concessions to Victorian conventionalities. The whole tenor of her career would be against that view. Her writing represents her real convictions, and her convictions came from her heart—as did Jane Eyre's.

Modern thinkers are quite right when they tell us that in our efforts to win the rising generation we should make much of the spirit of adventure, of romance, and of the desire for personal service. They are quite wrong if these things are to be treated as substitutes for, and not as supplementary to a sense of duty. People who wait for the wind of enthusiasm may never get a start, and when the wind does come you can never be sure how soon it will cease to blow, and leave the voyagers becalmed. Enthusiasm is an admirable servant, but a bad master.

It is not capable of being called up to order, and if we lay stress on it alone, we give people who do not feel it a fine excuse for doing nothing at all, all the more so when we teach them to look down on a sense of duty as the mark of an age that is inferior to their own.

CHAPTER VII.

MORAL IDEALS AND RELIGION.

WE advance to the subject of religion, but we advance as a rolling snow-ball does, carrying our gains with us and adding new ones as we move. That is why this chapter is headed by the words, Moral Ideals and Religion—not by the last alone.

Christianity cannot be compared to an extra subject —Greek, for instance, or music, or geology—added on at the end of a school curriculum, a subject, perhaps, desirable for a complete education, but not possible for everybody, and in any case so disconnected with the ordinary course that it may be treated independently. No doubt the moral virtues exist without a full Christianity, but a full Christianity does not exist without the moral virtues. Religion is not a department of life; all the departments of life are meant to be departments of religion.

The blunder, however, is a common one. It exists, as Donald Hankey pointed out, among the working classes, who admire many of the Christian virtues without ever connecting them in their minds with Christianity. It exists also, and with less excuse, among the wealthy, as we see in that very clever book, *Mademoiselle Ixe*, by Lanoe Falconer:

> "('Mademoiselle Ixe,' said Mrs. Barnes), 'taught very well indeed, but she had no religious principles. I told you that foreign Protestants rarely had; but this is one of the worst cases I ever heard of. . . She went (to Church) wherever her pupils happened to go, . . and on one occasion,' said Mrs. Barnes, sinking her voice to a tragic depth, 'she took part in a Unitarian Prayer Meeting.'

"'I am sure there must be some mistake . . . . Mademoiselle Ixe seems in every way such an excellent person; so kind to the children, and so obliging and unselfish.'

"'But, my dear Mrs. Merrington, what on earth has all that got to do with religion?'

". . . Mrs. Merrington paused, struck dumb by this unanswerable objection . . ."

There is another mistake which is still more important. Men urge that the moral virtues may not only exist without Christianity, which is quite true, but that they may exist just as well without Christianity, and that Christianity, even if it is important, is in no way necessary. If you are not a Christian, still you may be, so to speak, tall enough to pass muster, and you will not be much the worse because you are ten per cent. or twenty per cent. short of the proper height.

The fallacy lies in the arithmetical illustration, which, from the Christian standpoint, is altogether misleading. If you lack devotion to God or faith in God, you do not merely fall short of the normal in degree, you differ from it in kind. You are, to some extent, stunted, distorted, or malformed; you have an unsound spot in your constitution; at any rate, and this, perhaps, is the best way in which the case can be stated, you have missed the true line of your development. Devotion to God is meant to be the foundation, the support, and the goal of all devotion.

Right or wrong, these are the claims that Christianity puts forward, and the majority of novelists, even of the classical novelists, fail, not only to grasp their truth, but even to recognise their existence, a failure which we should not expect from artists who take a pride in being true to life on all its various sides.

In Dickens, people who go to Church are mostly hypocrites, like Chadband, or else reactionary prigs,

like Sir Leicester Deadlock. The famous grace sung by the children at the magnate's village feast is quite a good summary of the attitude of the Victorian aristocracy to religion on the view of some of their contemporaries. One version of it runs as follows:

"God bless the squire and his relations,
Make us contented with our rations,
And keep us in our proper stations."

Thackeray's clergy, in *Esmond*, are the toadies of the great families, and the Bishops are head over ears in ineffective political intrigue. Considering the period, the picture is not perhaps much overdrawn. The description is given as a historic picture, but no one will say that Thackeray's normal attitude to Christianity was markedly sympathetic.

As an example of a more appreciative view, take again the case of Jeanie Deans; it is well worth study. First, as we have said already, loyalty to her sister is combined with a sense of duty. She will face any adventure to save her sister's life, yet nothing will make her tell the lie that might save it by unlawful means.

"'I wad ware the best blood in my body to keep her scathless,' said Jeanie, weeping in bitter agony, 'but I canna change right into wrong, or make that true which is false.' (Ch. 14.)

"And so even when pressed by her sister: 'But that word is a grievous sin, and it's a deeper offence when it's a sin wilfully and presumptuously committed.'" (Ch. 19.)

Then, in the second place, in the speech to the Queen, we see how all her admirable qualities, sense of duty, affection for Effie, affection for her father, respect for royalty, respect and good will for the Queen herself, insight into the deep things of the soul, and a shrewd sense of the transitory pleasures of revenge, are bound up inextricably with a passionate religious faith.

"'My sister, my puir sister Effie, still lives,

though her days and hours are numbered. She still lives, and a word of the king's mouth might restore her to a broken-hearted auld man, that never, in his daily and nightly exercise, forgot to pray that his majesty might be blessed with a long and prosperous reign, and that his throne, and the throne of his posterity, might be established in righteousness. . . . Alas! it is not when we sleep soft and wake merrily ourselves that we think on other people's sufferings. . . . But when the hour of trouble comes to the mind, or to the body—and seldom may it visit your leddyship—and when the hour of death comes, that comes to high and low —lang and late may it be yours! O, my leddy, then it isna what we hae dune for oursel's, but what we hae dune for others, that we think on maist pleasantly. And the thought that ye hae intervened to spare the puir thing's life will be sweeter in that hour, come when it may, than if a word of your mouth could hang the hale Porteous mob at the tail of ae tow.' "

George Eliot, as regards religion, though not as regards morality, was a convinced agnostic; she spoke once to a friend of " the absolute impossibility of belief in God and immortality," and of " the absolute necessity of belief in duty." Yet, oddly enough, she had a profound sympathy with religion, especially with the simple faith of simple people like Adam Bede and Dinah Morris. None of her great contemporaries could have written that immortal passage describing how Maggie Tulliver found among her discarded school books a copy of the *Imitatio,* and how, as she read it, she heard the voice of the old monk talking to her across the centuries heart to heart:

" Maggie wanted some explanation of this hard, real life: . . . the little sordid tasks that filled the hours, or the more oppressive emptiness of weary joyless leisure; the need of some tender demon-

strative love; the cruel sense that Tom didn't mind what she thought or felt . . . . Her old school books were all barren of comfort, but by accident she came across a volume of the *Imitatio*. She took up the little, old, clumsy book with some curiosity: it had the corners turned down in many places, and some hand, now for ever quiet, had made at certain passages strong pen and ink marks, long since browned by time. Maggie turned from leaf to leaf, and read where the quiet hand pointed . . . . 'Know that the love of thyself hurteth thee more than anything in the world. . . If thou seekest this or that, and wouldst be here or there to enjoy thy own will and pleasure, thou shalt never be quiet nor free from care: . . . . which way soever thou dost turn thee, everywhere thou shalt find the Cross: and everywhere of necessity thou must have patience, if thou wilt have inward peace, and enjoy an everlasting crown. . . . '

" A strange thrill of awe passed through Maggie while she read, as if she had been wakened in the night by a strain of solemn music, telling of beings whose souls had been astir while hers was in stupor. She went on from one brown mark to another, where the quiet hand seemed to point, hardly conscious that she was reading—seeming rather to listen while a low voice said: . . . . 'In heaven ought to be thy dwelling, and all earthly things are to be looked on as they forward thy journey thither. All things pass away, and thou together with them. . . . I have often said unto thee, and now again I say the same, Forsake thyself, resign thyself, and thou shalt enjoy much inward peace . . . . '

" Maggie drew a long breath, and pushed her heavy hair back as if to see a sudden vision more clearly. . . . It flashed through her . , that all the miseries of her young life had come from fixing her heart on her own pleasure, as if that

were the central necessity of the universe; and for the first time she saw the possibility . . . of taking her stand out of herself, and looking at her own life as an insignificant part of a divinely guided whole . . . She sat in the deepening twilight forming plans of self-humiliation and entire devotedness; and in the ardour of first discovery, renunciation seemed to her the entrance into that satisfaction which she had so long been craving in vain. She had not perceived—how could she until she had lived longer?—the inmost truth of the old monk's outpourings, that renunciation remains sorrow, though a sorrow borne willingly. Maggie was still panting for happiness, and was in ecstasy because she had found the key to it."

(Good society, the author remarks, has a horror of fervent beliefs. Not so Maggie):

"From what you know of Maggie, you will not be surprised that she threw some exaggeration and wilfulness, some pride and impetuosity, even into her self-renunciation: her own life was still a drama for her, in which she demanded of herself that her part should be played with intensity. And so it came to pass that she often lost the spirit of humility by being excessive in the outward act."

(She went out of the way, says the author, to ask for sewing at the shops of St. Ogg's, in order to take her share in paying off the family debts.)

"'I don't like *my* sister to do such things,' said Tom. '*I'll* take care that the debts are paid, without your lowering yourself in that way.'

"She could see nothing but what was entirely wrong and unkind, nay, persecuting, in Tom's reproof of her for this unnecessary act.

"Surely there was some tenderness and bravery mingled with the worldliness and self-assertion of that little speech; but Maggie held it as dross, overlooking the grains of gold, and took Tom's rebuke as one of her outward crosses. Tom was

very hard to her, she used to think, . . . to her who had always loved him so: and then she strove to be contented with that hardness, and to require nothing. That is the path we all like when we set out on our abandonment of egoism—the path of martyrdom and endurance, . . . where the palm branches grow, rather than the steep highway of tolerance, just allowance, and self-blame, where there are no leafy honours to be gathered and worn."

Maggie Tulliver never broke away from the tendency to make her faith the handmaid of her craving for happiness. She never quite realised that although the pursuit of goodness ought to be and is accompanied with pleasure, yet "the pleasure of pursuit" is not to be confused with "the pursuit of pleasure."

The religion of Dinah Morris went deeper, and was the secret of her influence. As the Governor of the gaol said, it gave her "a key to unlock hearts," even the heart of poor Hetty Sorel, black with panic and despair, waiting the day of her execution. George Eliot, with all her philosophy—what sort of message could she have brought to Hetty, even though she could describe others doing what she could not do herself?

Character drawing was not Charles Kingsley's strong point; most of his best portraits are much alike, modelled on himself and on the sturdy virtues which he loved and practised. But he can paint men who, to use an old Lancashire expression, are "jannock"—"upright and downright,"—practical, straightforward, and conscientious, and who combine these qualities with a childlike faith. Sir Richard Grenvile is an example, the "wise and gallant gentleman, lovely to all good men, awful to all bad men; in whose presence none dare say or do a mean or a ribald thing; whom brave men left, feeling themselves nerved to do their duty better, while cowards slipped away, as bats and owls before the sun . . . .

ever the same steadfast, Godfearing, chivalrous man, conscious (so far as a soul so healthy could be conscious) of the pride of beauty, and strength, and valour, and wisdom . . ."

There is an eloquence and an enthusiasm here that makes up for any absence of subtlety. The writer who can see and admire the best side of life, and whose eloquence can make other people see and feel as he does himself—such a writer, even though he can achieve nothing else, does not compare unfavourably with those who can describe all sides of life with the exception of the best. Realists may claim to take an impartial survey of all human characteristics, good, bad and indifferent, but the claim will not bear investigation; for if you are dispassionate about what is excellent you cannot do justice to what is excellent; if you deal unenthusiastically with what deserves enthusiasm, your survey may be broad, but it is shallow; and you are failing to get at the nature of things as they really are.

Again, if Kingsley is a preacher, and, often enough a dull preacher, he can be forceful and dramatic in episodes when in broad lines he pictures the clash of good and evil issues. Amyas, on fire with the passion of personal revenge, follows the *Sta. Catharina* round the seas and then up the Channel in the storm. He

> "had got the hone out of his pocket again, and was whetting away at his sword edge, as if there was some dreadful doom on him, to whet, and whet, for ever. Then the bows of the Spaniard fell on the Shutter rock, and she rolled clean over, and vanished for ever and ever. 'Shame!' cried Amyas, hurling his sword far into the sea; 'to lose my right, my right! when it was in my very grasp! Unmerciful!'"

And then the lightning flash, the blindness, the silence, and at the end, the vision when the blinded giant wins back the heart of a little child, shoulders his share of the blame, forgives, and is forgiven:

"I saw him sitting in his cabin, like a valiant gentleman of Spain; and his officers were sitting round him, with their swords upon the table at the wine. And the prawns and the crayfish and the rockling, they swam in and out above their heads; but Don Guzman he never heeded, but sat still and drank his wine. Then he took a locket from his bosom; and I heard him speak, and he said: 'Here's the picture of my fair and true lady; drink to her, Senors all.' Then he spoke to me, and called me, right up through the oar-weed and the sea: 'We have had a fair quarrel, Senor; it is time to be friends once more. My wife and your brother have forgiven me; so your honour takes no stain.' And I answered, 'We are friends, Don Guzman; God has judged our quarrel, and not we.' Then he said, 'I sinned, and I am punished.' And I said, 'And, Senor, so am I.' Then he held out his hand to me; and I stopped to take it, and woke."

The faith of Kingsley's heroes, Greek or English, and the humility that goes along with faith, raises them above the level of buccaneers, of adventurers, of patriots, and gives a deeper meaning to the stories in which they play their part.

Henry Kingsley has less literary power than his brother, but he is equally wholesome, and much more human, humorous, and racy. After a course of the average novels, in which the deeper issues are left on one side or touched on with an apologetic lightness, to find men who can handle them quite plainly and naturally comes to one with a sense of pleasant surprise; it is like meeting a live friend in a valley of dry bones.

The slum worker in *Ravenshoe* is a case in point. He is witty, genial and never unkind; he has knowledge of the world and no desire to obtrude his knowledge. He has a passionate faith, and he can keep it to himself, till the opportunity comes,

and then when the opportunity does come, why he takes the heart by storm. Even Lord Saltire, "that terrible old heathen," owns his fascination. He is speaking of how his wife died while he was a missionary in the Australian bush:

"'I thought she was looking at the mountain, but she was looking far beyond that, for she said: 'I shall have to wait thirty years for you, James, but I shall be very happy and very busy. The time will go quick enough for me, but it will be a slow weary time, for you, my darling. Go home from here . . . . into the great towns, and see what can be done there.' And so she went to sleep.

"'I rebelled for three days. I went away into the bush with Satan at my elbow all the time, through dry places, through the forest, down by lonely creek-sides, up among bald volcanic downs, where there are slopes of slippery turf, leading to treacherous precipices of slag; and then through the quartz ranges, and the reedy swamps, where the black swans float. . . . All about I went among the beasts and the birds.

"'But on the third day the Lord wearied of me, and took me back, and I lay on His bosom again like a child.

"'He will always take you home, my Lord, if you come. After three days, after thrice twenty years, my Lord. Time is nothing to Him.'

"Lord Saltire was looking on him with kindly admiration.

"'There is something in it, my Lord. Depend upon it that it is not all a dream. Would you not give all your amazing wealth, all your honours, everything to change places with me?'

"'I certainly would,' said Lord Saltire. 'I have always been of the opinion that there was something in it . . . . But you must take up with that sort of thing very early in life if you mean it to have any reality at all. I am too old now.'"

In a footnote the author explains with his usual unconventionality that the last remark represents Lord Saltire's views and not his own.

In spite of a style that is often casual to a degree the critic is right who says that it is difficult to read Henry Kingsley aloud either "through wanting to laugh or through wanting not to cry." His characters were so real to him that he makes them real to his readers, and he was so fond of them that he could not find it in his heart to make any of them thoroughly bad. Lord Ascot, that "irreclaimable blackguard," comes hurrying to Lord Saltire to tell him he has seen the long lost Charles:

> "'Bring the major-domo here instantly,' says Lord Saltire to the footman.
>
> "'You know what you have done, Ascot?' he goes on . . . 'I am going to alter my will.'
>
> "'Of course you are,' said Lord Ascot. 'Do you dream I did not know that before I came here?'
>
> "'And yet you came?'
>
> "'Yes; with all the devils out of hell dragging me back.'
>
> "'As a matter of curiosity, why?'
>
> "'Oh, I couldn't do it, you know. I've done a good many dirty things; but I couldn't do that, particularly to that man. There are some things a fellow can't do, you know.'"

(The major-domo came and received his instructions.)

> "'Do you repent, Ascot?'
>
> "'No,' said he. 'Damn it all, you know I could not do it when I came to think of it. The money would never have stayed with me, I take it. Good-night.'"

But, of course, Lord Saltire never altered a line of that will, and the irreclaimable blackguard came into half a million of money.

One of the best known modern writers on ethics suggests that for conscience' sake no one ever refused to fight a duel, or go against or beyond the moral standards of his age, unless his conscience was backed up by religious faith.

We have seen faith bringing about results of this kind in cases like that of Jeanie Deans; we come across them again in Shorthouse's famous book where devotion seems to be carried to its highest point. John Inglesant has been brought up at the feet of the Jesuits to regard himself as a living tool to be used or discarded for God's purposes at God's pleasure. For the king's sake he is ready to risk his life and his reputation; he is ready, not only to be a martyr, but to give up the credit of being thought a martyr, and even to accept the discredit of being thought the meanest kind of traitor, knowing that the king cannot say a word to put things straight. And, according to plan, he carries on to the bitter end.

In R. H. Benson's strong book, *None Other Gods*, we get a similar story of complete devotion, of a life found by being thrown away. His opulent Eton and Oxford hero turns Roman Catholic, is disowned by his family, sells his books and pictures, and, obedient to a call, becomes a professional tramp. He falls in with another gentleman of the roads, the decayed, very much decayed, major, accompanied by the outcast girl who has been decoyed from a respectable home; a girl singularly unattractive, empty-headed and ungrateful. In the end he brings her back to her mother, and is then duly murdered by the man from whom he has freed her. What a waste of a life! is the obvious comment, to counter which is the object of the story. The climax is reached by the long road of the mystics, "The road blood-reddened of the royal Cross." The man undergoes one degradation after another, being put in prison, for instance, on the charge of stealing money from a child. Then, when all sense of

satisfaction in playing the martyr has evaporated, he gets his reward. Even the girl, unsatisfactory as she is, attains the salvation for which she was fitted. The waste has been justified.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE OTHER SIDE OF THE PICTURE.

WE have been thinking about the nature of true devotion, devotion, that is, to worthy ends, a devotion which forms the essence, or at any rate a large part of the essence, of what we mean by moral goodness.

We deal next with moral evil, which Christians call sin, and it may be considered under two forms.

The first form is negative, consisting in the absence of true devotion to worthy ends.

The second form is positive; it consists in devotion either to ends that are unworthy of devotion, or to ends that are bad in themselves, which ought not to be pursued at all. Devotion of this kind is usually identical with egotism, the worship of the portable idol of the self which we carry about with us everywhere. Craving for comforts, craving for power, craving for possessions, craving for the esteem of others, and craving for our own self-esteem, are some of its main aspects.

In ordinary life lack of true devotion and devotion to unworthy ends are not sharply separated, although we can distinguish them in thought. Thus we make too little of our neighbour's interests because we make too much of our own, and the love of money may be the result of love of self-indulgence or of pride or of both.

The illustrations which form the bulk of this chapter are used to bring out one special point, but in most cases they might be used to bring out half a dozen other points equally well.

In Jane Austen's novels, devotion to causes or to any very exalted ends is conspicuous for its absence.

Although she wrote between the years 1800 and 1815, you hardly notice a single passage in which her highly respectable characters betray any sort of acquaintance with an episode called the French Revolution, with the names of Napoleon or Nelson, with the fact that there was a European War and that England was engaged in it, or with anything calling for comment or criticism in the condition of the industrial classes. No one expects that the author should have made these things the central interest of her books, but it is a reflection on herself, on her books, and on the society she describes, that their placidity should be so entirely untroubled by a spark from the great world outside.

In a lower rank of life George Eliot's Hetty Sorel combines a passion for pleasure with the absence of devotion to any ends big or little. "Why," she seems to ask plaintively, "why can't I always do exactly what I like? Why should I trouble to please people who are fond of me when I'm not fond of them?" Egotistic as a baby, unmoral as a kitten, the claims of her neighbours, of duty, of causes, mean to her just nothing at all.

E. F. Benson's Dodo books describe the same unlovely combination as it exists in the sophisticated fashionable circles of our own day, a combination that is all the more objectionable because it exists among people who are clever, witty, and—so long as they are not crossed—good-humoured and attractive.

In the first of the trilogy, Dodo's superabundant vitality, physical and intellectual, throws into relief her complete deadness to the deeper side of her environment. Like Hetty Sorel she has a massive indifference to the claims of natural affection, but without the excuse of Hetty's lack of imagination.

In the post-war book, *Dodo Wonders*, we come to the third phase. One of its points is to show how little real unselfishness there was in the feverish energy with which Dodo and her set threw themselves into the war work, and how little difference

those critical years made to their outlook. As one of the characters in the book says:

> "All the people who live the sort of life which you have deliberately adopted as your own are precisely like fleas. You hop about with dreadful springs and take little bites of other people, and call that life. If you hear of some marvellous new invention, you invite the inventor to lunch and suck a little of his blood. Then at dinner you are told that everybody is talking about some new book, so you buy a copy next morning, cut the first fifty pages, leave it about in a prominent place, and ask the author to tea. Meanwhile, you forget all about the inventor."

In the last lines of the book—in which incidentally the meaning of the title is explained—Dodo argues, against her friend Edith, that the war has changed everything and everybody.

> "'Darling, you're wrong there,' said Dodo. 'It has made the most immense difference. For instance—now-a-days—we're all as poor as rats, though we trot along still. Now-a-days——'
>
> "A tall parlour-maid came in.
>
> "'The car's at the door, my lady,' she said.
>
> "'Put the golf clubs in,' said Dodo.
>
> "'Tell me some of the enormous differences,' asked Edith.
>
> "Dodo waited till the door had closed.
>
> "'Well, we all have parlour-maids,' she said. 'That's an enormous difference.'
>
> "She paused a moment.
>
> "'Ah! that reminds me,' she said. 'Jack, I interviewed a butler this morning who, I think, will do. He wants a thousand a year.'
>
> "Edith shouted with laughter.
>
> "'Poor as rats,' she said, 'and parlour-maids! Any other differences, Dodo?'
>
> "'I wonder,' she said."

Wonder, if only it goes deep enough, is the main-

spring of philosophy. It is not likely that Dodo's wonder did go deep. Her life was too busy—the car was waiting at the door. Yet she had intelligence. That was the tragedy.

In characters like these, in spite of their cleverness, there is something essentially vulgar. Dodo's friends flock to the wedding in the Abbey, cackle their loudest, and rather enjoy the feeling that they have no respect for the genius of the place, for the dim religious light, and for that bourgeois thing which people call religion. In reality, they are as barbarous as the trippers who scrabble their names on the ruins of Tintern or the pillars of Stonehenge. They fall under the criticism made by the cicerone in the Italian picture gallery—"It is not the pictures which are on their trial, but the spectators." If the valet cannot see that his master is a hero, it is the valet who stands condemned.

We may doubt, in passing, whether wit or an appreciation of wit is at all a common feature in any circle of fashionable society. A critic, who may know something about it—he was born in Mayfair, he tells us, and lived most of his life in Belgravia—says it scarcely exists at all. He never heard anyone make an epigram or talk like the characters in the novels of Benson or in Anthony Hope's *Dolly Dialogues*. Not a bad thing either:

> "'You're getting into the habit,' remarked Dolly, 'of being unintelligible. . . . I met a man the other day who said he never understood what you meant.'
>
> "'You'd understand if you stayed; why did you go away?'
>
> "'To change,' answered Dolly.
>
> "I was pleased. 'It's an old trick of yours,' said I."

It would be a bad mistake to take wealthy devotees of pleasure for a type of the wealthy classes as a whole. Still, books of the Dodo type are not thrown away. The tendency to idolise pleasure is present in everybody of every class, and among

considerable minorities of every class it becomes a dominant tendency. Crowds who do not live for expensive amusements, live to get as much amusement as they can afford—and often a good deal more. Where this motive prevails, there is no great dissimilarity between the haves and have-nots, except that some of the haves are sufficiently educated to wonder, as Dodo wondered, whether their lives are altogether satisfactory. With a little adaptation Lewis Carrol's great book, which is written about nothing and illuminates everything, provides the verdict:

> "'I like the Walrus best,' said Alice, 'because you see he was a *little* ashamed of eating so many oysters.'
>
> "'He ate more than the Carpenter, though,' said Tweedledee.. . .
>
> "'Then I like the Carpenter best,' said Alice, 'if he didn't eat so many as the Walrus.'
>
> "'But he ate as many as he could get,' said Tweedledum.
>
> "This was a puzzler. After a pause, Alice said, 'Well! I think they were both very unpleasant characters.'"

In many cases egotism may show itself in an ardent desire, not for pleasure, but for admiration.

Arnold Bennett's hero, "the Card," revels in the joys of self-advertisement. Like the Georgian courtiers in Conan Doyle's *Rodney Stone,* but in the very different sphere of the Five Towns, he swims into notoriety by "cultivating his eccentricities." He is a bit of a cad, no doubt, but he arrives; and his ambitions are so child-like and bland that they are half excusable. You feel that they are a hobby, rather than an essential part of himself. He was reformable, even if he never reformed.

This passion for the limelight exists in a more dangerous and insidious form in good religious

people who, unknown to themselves, are living for its sake.

Harold Frederic's book, *Illumination*, which might well have been called "Deterioration," brings out the point in the case of a nonconformist minister, young, simple-minded, single-minded, and a preacher of exceptional power, but soon spoiled by flattery and admission to higher circles than his own. He has disgraced himself in the eyes of his district, his friends, his wife, and himself; then he resigns his ministry, and plans to make a fresh beginning in business. Penitent as he is, or at least thoroughly ashamed of himself, the old passion for admiration is strong in him still. He dreams day-dreams of dominating the crowds in his new home at Seattle out west, of being a senator at Washington by the time he is forty; it is always himself who makes the centre of the picture. His wife, to whom he has been unfaithful, but who has held by him loyally, is very much in the background:

> "'What Soulsby said about politics out there, interested me enormously,' he remarked to the two women. 'I can speak, you know, if I can't do anything else . . . Who knows? I may turn up in Washington, a full-blown Senator, before I'm forty . . .'
>
> "'We'll come and visit you then . . .' said Sister Soulsby, cheerfully. 'You shall take us to the White House, Alice, and introduce us.'
>
> "'Oh, it isn't likely I would ever come East,' said Alice, pensively. 'Most probably I'd be left to amuse myself in Seattle. . . .'"

Shakespeare's Henry V. (his one attempt, according to Ruskin, to draw a hero), is out quite frankly for fame, he covets honour, and he is not ashamed to confess it. His candour is in contrast with the ideals of modern aristocracy. If he had been to Eton or the Varsity, good form might have checked his ambition or have prevented him putting it into

words. Current witticisms—which you can put the other way round, at discretion—illustrate the point. "The Oxford man looks as if all the world belongs to him; the Cambridge man looks as if he doesn't care to whom it belongs." The Cambridge man likes to feel that he is independent of the world; the Oxford man likes to feel the world is dependent on himself. Both of them when they talk, talk "like almighty God addressing a flea." Both of them are superior, and both of them are conscious of their superiority. But they do not parade it, and they are not anxious about its being recognized. It is a fact, and that satisfies them.

We find the same sort of ideal in the strong, silent heroes of Merriman, and in the Empire-builders of Kipling, men who, so far as the public is concerned, are content to work unknown. Even "the departmental praise," which is all the sweeter because it is doled out so sparingly, is not the motive of their actions. The naval officer took a similar line when he wrote, "the less the newspapers extol our gallantry, the better we are pleased."

Here, in caricature or otherwise, we have the point of view of the good form that sways the public schools, the universities, and the services. It is not a bad point of view either. It works, it earns respect, it makes for discipline, and it is a counter-weight against the spirit of commercialism and the blatant ambitions of the professional politician. But when this ideal becomes, consciously or unconsciously, a dominant motive, the case is different. That motive is a form of pride, more or less concealed. It is quite possible to think little of applause, not because you are humble, but because you are as proud as Lucifer. Like Aristotle's "magnanimous man," you regard the esteem of your inferiors as worthless, the esteem of your equals as no more than you deserve, while as to the esteem of your superiors, well it does not exist, for you recognize no one as your superior.

In Meredith's *The Egoist,* Sir Willoughby Pattern combines the points we have noticed in a delicately exaggerated form—selfish regard for his own interests, desire for esteem, and sense of his own importance. What distinguishes him is that his egoism is so extremely conscientious; though the conscience that produces it is a distorted conscience. He does not merely mean to get his own way—all selfish people mean that; he is genuinely convinced that a man of his birth and position has a positive right to get his own way. Like Louis Quatorze, he thinks there is only one sun above the horizon, and that sun is himself; the moon and the stars exist to do him obeisance.

A self-centred pride, refined or otherwise, is the basis of most heathen systems of morality, and we find it in its most attractive guise in Dumas' famous series, especially in the concluding volumes of the *Vicomte de Bragelonne.*

The flamboyant melodrama, the impossible adventures, the real humour, form a pleasant background to the pathos and the humanity. No wonder that the four friends, d'Artagnan in particular, were so dear to the largely pagan mind of Stevenson.

There is Porthos, the giant, with his childlike vanity. "If you want to be rid of him," says Aramis to Philippe, "make him a duke; for if you do that, he will certainly die of joy."

"Simple Porthos!"—with his domain of Pierrefonds and his little estate du Vallon, "so called (as he says in his will) because it lies in a valley," with his endless pictures "which it wearies my eyes to look at," and his five thousand books "which I have never opened."

"Amiable Porthos!"—"I am so gentle"; he tells Raoul. "I have only fought a hundred and sixty or seventy duels, far fewer than d'Artagnan, who is perhaps a little testy and hot tempered."

"Noble Porthos!"—effacing himself always before the superior wisdom of his friends; faithful to

the last to Aramis who has deceived him, "because, if you have deceived me it was for my good"; fighting his last great fight in the cave that falls in on him, and where "the giant sleeps the eternal sleep in the tomb that God has made to his measure."

"Porthos," says d'Artagnan, "was all heart." He seems to have been a practising Catholic, and though he always did go to sleep when his chaplain preached, and though the hundred or so opponents he killed in his duels might have something to say in the matter, he has, perhaps, the best claim of the four to be considered a Christian.

Next comes Aramis, the ex-musketeer, Bishop of Vannes, the subtle and dangerous conspirator, ambitious to be the power behind the throne—behind all the thrones. For fourteen years he carries with him a secret of state, "a secret that burns like fire," which he reveals to the dying general of the order of the Jesuits.

"Do you give us this secret," asks the general, "without ambition and with no hope of a return?"

"With ambition," replies Aramis, "and with a hope of return; for you will make of me, now you know me for the man I am, what I can be and what I ought to be."

"Ecce, homo!" says the general, and he creates Aramis his successor.

Unlike Hadrian the Emperor with his "Omnia fui et nihil profuit," Aramis shows no signs of disillusionment. "Men like us," he says in his old age to d'Artagnan, "do not die till we are satiated with joy and glory."

Then Athos. Cultured, refined, reserved, conscientiously and consciously honourable, Porthos, as rough men would, looks up to him as a superior being; while poor d'Artagnan thinks of him as his ideal of a Christian—"the day you become a priest I shall go to Church and hear your sermon." He

is a devotee of "the principles of loyalty and royalty"; faithful and affectionate to his son and to his friends; yet as proud in his own way as Aramis—so proud that he will not seek office, that he will not accept office; so self-sufficient that he takes no interest, as d'Artagnan does, in the affairs of common people. Egoistic in sorrow as in prosperity, when his son dies, he dies, content to let the world and even his friends go their own way by themselves.

And last, d'Artagnan himself. Shrewd and cunning, like Aramis, but not a plotter for the sake of making plots; affectionate, like Porthos; not quixotically loyal, nor loyal on principle, like Athos, but loyal on instinct, both to the king, and, rather more so, to his friends. He is not a religious man, this good d'Artagnan. By the king's order, he is conducting Athos to the Bastille, and on the way he offers to help him to escape. Athos, loyal and devout as ever, refuses, for the king is king, and his will is law. "But," he adds, "Providence will help me." "And I know someone who will lend Providence a helping hand," says d'Artagnan.

Set on getting rich, set on getting on, he is of the world worldly. He is proud, like Aramis, but with the ruffling pride of a Gascon and a soldier; ambitious, not to rule kingdoms, but to stand first in his own sphere; to be Captain of the Musketeers, and Marshall of France; to feel himself looked up to, and even feared, by his superiors; to impress his will on the king. Soured a little by waiting, success comes at last; but it comes when he is old, when his friends are dead or in exile, when men and manners are changed, when, it appears, there is only one will in the state, and that will is the king's. So d'Artagnan is tamed; his pride pales before the greater pride of his master.

In *Memories and Portraits*, Stevenson pays an eloquent tribute to his friend:

"It is in the character of d'Artagnan that we

must look for that spirit of morality . . . which sets the book high above more popular rivals . . . (With the coming of years) . . . d'Artagnan has mellowed into a man so witty, rough, kind, and upright, that he takes the heart by storm. There is nothing of the copy-book about his virtues, nothing of the drawing-room in his fine, natural civility; he will sail near the wind; he is no district visitor—no Wesley or Robespierre; his conscience is void of all refinement, whether for good or evil; but the whole man rings true like a good sovereign . . . . If I am to choose virtues for myself or my friends, let me choose the virtues of d'Artagnan. I do not say there is no character as well drawn in Shakespeare; I do say there is none I love so wholly.

"There is yet another point in the *Vicomte* which I find incomparable. I can recall no other work of the imagination in which the end of life is represented with so nice a tact . . . I find (in it) a singular charm of spirit. It breathes a pleasant and a tonic sadness, always brave, never hysterical. Upon the crowded, noisy life of this long tale, evening gradually falls; and the lights are extinguished, and the heroes pass away, one by one. One by one they go, and not a regret embitters their departure; the young succeed them in their places; Louis Quatorze is swelling larger and shining broader; another generation and another France dawn on the horizon; but for us and these old men we have loved so long, the inevitable end draws near and is welcome. To read this well is to anticipate experience. Ah, if only when these hours of the long shadows fall for us in reality and not in figure, we may hope to face them with a mind as quiet!

"But my paper is running out: the siege guns are firing on the Dutch frontier; and I must say adieu for the fifth time to my old comrade, fallen on the field of glory. *Adieu*, or rather

au revoir! Yet a sixth time, dearest d'Artagnan, we shall kidnap Monk and take horse together for Belle Isle."

But, for all Stevenson says, the outlook of heathenism, Greek, Roman, French, or English, is not a cheerful outlook, in spite of its courage and its kindliness. There is a brooding sadness over life. Porthos is habitually bored; the plans of Aramis miscarry; Athos is morbid; d'Artagnan is disillusioned. The sky is not a cloudless blue; it is silver grey at the best. The dying words of d'Artagnan, "Athos, Porthos, au revoir.—Aramis, à jamais adieu,"—can hardly be taken to express a hope that he had held habitually; and if that hope did dawn at last, he might have been a little more like a Christian if he had not been quite so confident of a happy reunion with two of his friends, and quite so confident that poor Aramis was to be excluded.

CHAPTER IX.

MODERN PRODIGALS.

THE views of many modern writers on the subject of the Christian view of sin and penitence are curiously confused and confusing.

In some moods and in some ways the majority of them seem tolerably orthodox. In the novels, as we have had occasion to point out, the badness of the bad is duly noted, and made to serve as a foil to the goodness of the good. Every now and then, however, something seems to remind the writer of his orthodoxy, and then he begins to get restive, thinks it proper to blaspheme a little, and makes a few skittish remarks to show his independence of the conventionalities. Thus Walt Whitman expresses his admiration for the animals because they do not make him sick by whining and weeping over their sins, and Kipling in his early days reports Torpenhow saying that the truly healthy man does not know that he has got a soul.

Sir Oliver Lodge's dictum is well known to the effect that the modern man is "not worrying about his sins," that he wants to "be up and doing." And when we appeal to the rising generation we are urged to emphasise, not "the danger and degradation of sin," but the attractiveness of "personal service and adventure."

These ideas have a good deal in them, but in the form in which they are often stated they will not bear criticism.

For if "to be up and doing," if "service and adventure," are great and urgent virtues, then the indolent, unserviceable, unadventurous life, is a serious vice. If the modern man does not "worry about" this sin, in the sense of not taking it seriously,

so much the worse for the modern man; he is not likely to be strenuous if he has no objection to being slack. Perhaps what is meant is that when we have made up our mind to be strenuous in the future we need not trouble to be sorry about our slackness in the past. But this will not do either. It is only decent that we should be ashamed of the facts, if the facts are shameful; and we cannot be ashamed without being sorry. Again, assuming that we believe in God, it is only common sense to recognise that we owe him an apology, and if we owe him an apology, then that apology must be made.

It is true enough, on the other hand, that the sense of sin may be exaggerated, and this is what the critics often have in mind.

We get examples in a number of early Victorian books, of which Mrs. Sewell's *Laneton Parsonage* is a type; and which is well worth reading if only on that account, though, probably, like most of its class, it is long out of print. It is an old-fashioned story, frankly written to edify, with no slightest attempt to camouflage the moral; yet the psychology is excellent, and holds true enough of children when they get religion, or rather, when religion gets them, a thing which may happen even in the twentieth century. The head girl of the school, clever, influential, not conceited, but pleasantly aware of her prestige, runs off the rails, lies to keep up her reputation, gets further afield, till the inevitable exposure. Then comes penitence, confession, and realization of the fact that she has been keen really, not on the people she has helped, but on her reputation for helpfulness. Unfortunately, her parents, elders, and betters can show no lightness of touch, no geniality, in dealing with the situation; and the culprit is made to feel herself the chief of sinners. Now to feel yourself the centre of the universe is not a wholesome thing, whether as a penitent, or as the acknowledged pillar of your school. You can be serious about yourself without being so deadly

solemn as the characters of *Laneton Parsonage*. Even so, books of this kind take a whole side of things into account of which the more brilliant and artistic school stories of to-day say little or nothing. They may be stodgy, but a sympathetic reader will be mildly intrigued.

No doubt the Victorian tags have become conventional, but modern tags too have become so common, not to say commonplace, that often we seem only to have changed one set of conventionalities for another. This reflection, if it is not sacrilegious to say so, is suggested by Stevenson's little fable of the Penitent. It is only some dozen lines long, and we must condense it still further.

"'Why are you weeping?' said the Man to the Boy.

"'For my sins,' said the boy.

"'You might have something better to do,' said the man.

"Next day the boy was again in tears, and again the man asked, 'Why are you weeping?'

"'Because I have nothing to eat,' was the reply.

"'I thought that was what it would come to,' said the man."

Neat, yes; but is it profound, or even clever? Let us recast the story and see.

"'What's the trouble about?' asked the man.

"'I've had nothing to eat,' said the boy, 'and it's my own fault. I made a regular beast of myself to my people, and ran away from home.'

"'Why do you look so pleased?' the man said a day or two after.

"'Because I've owned up,' said the boy. 'I got a licking of course, but they've been awfully decent ever since; and I don't mean to be such an ass again.'"

On the modern view, the boy ought to have slapped his father on the back and said, "It's all right, old man; I'm not worrying, and you needn't worry

either. Bygones are bygones, and we'll go ahead now as if nothing had happened."

Is the Stevenson version any real improvement on the parable of the Prodigal Son? Has not the father the right to say that if it takes two to make a quarrel, so it takes two to make a forgiveness?

CHAPTER X.

PROVIDENCE AND POETIC JUSTICE.

THINK again of Frederic Myers' question, "Is the Universe friendly?" Suppose we agree that devotion is urgent and necessary, does the Universe take any notice of us and our devotion? Is there a divinity, is there a providence, that shapes our ends—or its own ends? that does anything to help us, whether with our co-operation or apart from our co-operation?

One answer to these questions consists in what we may call the theory of poetic justice, according to which there is a close and inevitable connection between goodness and happiness on the one hand, and between badness and unhappiness on the other.

a. In the ordinary form of the theory happiness and unhappiness are based on outward circumstances. The good come to a good end; they succeed, and their success makes them happy. The bad come to a bad end; they fail, and their failure makes them unhappy. Dickens, an exponent, as always, of the ordinary view, ladles out these rewards and punishments with a lavish hand; disgrace and ruin, imprisonment and capital punishment, suicide, murder, and spontaneous combustion, to the bad; to the good, happy marriages; to the penitent, new life in the British Colonies.

In some cases the distribution of these prizes and punishments is crudely conceived. They occur supernaturally in the narrower sense of the word; they do not follow from the events that precede them. We are not meant to take them very seriously. It is the novelist himself who is playing providence to the puppets of his imagination. His picture is

meant to please a public which likes, as we all like, to escape from the brutality of the facts. Neither the novelist nor his readers are deceived into thinking that the picture represents things as they are.

In other cases, however, the results are described as the natural and necessary results of character and conduct. This does not mean that they are any the less providential. It means that we do not think of providence as a power standing over and above the world, interposing in it to put things right as a mechanic visits a factory to mend a broken engine; but that we think of it as a power that works in and through natural processes. In the long run, in the case of individuals often, in the case of bad systems always, evil issues in disaster, and disaster in misery.

So far, then, the primary results of virtue and vice are outward results consisting in success or failure; these outward results bring with them happiness or unhappiness, which may, therefore, be called results that are indirect or secondary.

b. We come next to a more plausible, subtle, and refined form of the theory of poetic justice. Virtue and vice have happiness or unhappiness for their *direct* results, or rather, for their necessary accompaniments. We may get the outward results as well, but the inward results do not depend on them. The good, even in times of adversity, are, on the whole, happy. The bad are, on the whole, unhappy, even though they are prosperous, and though the pleasures of prosperity are real pleasures. This is what is generally meant when people say, "Virtue is its own reward and vice is its own punishment."

* * *

The illustrations following bring out forcibly the two forms of the theory, and some of them bring out both forms at the same time. It is, in fact, impossible to keep them sharply separate.

In the case of the little adventuress of *Vanity Fair*, disgrace, the outward result of unscrupulous

selfishness, is combined with boredom, its inward accompaniment:

"Becky tried to make a character for herself, and conquer scandal . . . But whenever she made a little circle for herself with incredible toils and labour, somebody came and swept it down rudely, and she had all her work to begin over again. It was hard, very hard; lonely and disheartening . . . . Becky (at the Eagles) was very respectable and orderly at first, but the life of humdrum virtue grew utterly tedious to her before long."

Even in her periods of triumph she is restlessly discontented, living, as Chesterton says, in a state of "purposeless energy," which reminds us of "the rhythmic kicking of a bisected insect"; a state, as he adds, which is as much like hell as anything we are able to conceive.

Matthew Arnold suggested a somewhat similar frame of mind in the case of the Roman nobility in the time of the early Emperors:

> "On that hard pagan world,
> Disgust, and secret loathing, fell.
> Deep weariness and sated lust
> Made human life a hell. . ."

In George Eliot the inevitable result or accompaniment of sin—moral deterioration, increasing misery, and ultimate disaster—is brought out with tremendous force, quite in accordance with the spirit of the old Greek tragedies—of the Persæ, for example, where the Messenger moralizes over the fall of Xerxes:

> "A man
> Should have no thoughts that are too high for him.
> Always presumption blossoms, and the fruit
> Is doom, and all the harvest only tears."

Tito Melema, the cultured Greek, and Hetty Sorel, the English peasant girl, are both of them attractive children of the sun. Tito, at any rate, is fundamentally good-natured in his easy-going way, and will

do a great deal to make things pleasant for others; but like Hetty, he will not give up anything that makes things pleasant for himself. So they drift downhill, piling up their debts to destiny, till they pass out of sight, like birds "taken in an evil net."

In a climax of this kind the Greeks traced the finger of the gods. George Eliot's agnosticism barred her from seeing what the Greeks saw, yet no one would guess that she was anything but an orthodox Christian. If not a personal providence, a fate that works on the lines of providence looms big in all she wrote.

There is a vivid picture of a similar fall in the case of Stevenson's Dr. Jekyll, who, in spite of his respectability, is living the life of a sensualist. He learns how to transform himself into Hyde, the ugly embodiment of all Jekyll's ugliest vices. At first, he makes the transformation in either direction easily and at will. Then, the change back to Jekyll becomes increasingly difficult, and at last, impossible. He is identified once and for all with evil.

It is the tale of a pilgrim—of a Pilgrim's Regress, —one of the best since Bunyan's. In the classical manner a single episode illustrating a single point is worked up for study, while in Bunyan we have a whole crowd of characters, and a complex plot, complex like life itself, from which we may draw an indefinite number of morals at our own discretion—and at our own risk.

The Master of Ballantrae follows the same classical lines. The Master himself is not unworthy to be placed beside the Mephistopheles of Goethe, as one of the best devils in literature. He is attractive, a born leader of men, able to win their affection as well as their respect. He has a sombre dignity, and he has strength of purpose, of which he is profoundly conscious, always going on his way, as he says of himself, "with an inevitable motion."

But subtly enough you are made to feel that the ruin of his moral character brings with it the ruin

of his natural gifts. The dignity and the attractiveness wear thin:

> "He loved the note of his own tongue, as indeed, he loved all the parts and properties of himself; a sort of imbecility which almost necessarily attends upon wickedness. . . . He had fallen in a long life of idleness into a positive need of company. I have seen him driven to long discourses with the skipper; and this, although the man plainly testified his weariness, fiddling miserably with both hand and foot, and replying only with a grunt. Sometimes my gorge rose against him as though he were deformed, and sometimes I would draw away from him as from something partly spectral. I had moments when I thought of him as a man of pasteboard—as though, if one should strike smartly through the buckram of his countenance, there would be found a mere vacuity within. This horror (not merely fanciful, I think) vastly increased my detestation of his neighbourhood."

This deterioration was the necessary accompaniment of a morbid egoism, and it issued naturally in his constant failures and his sordid end.

CHAPTER XI.

PROVIDENCE AND TRAGEDY.

In both its forms, especially in its refined form, the theory of poetic justice goes very near the heart of things. Its truth, however, is not always obvious. The theory seems to break down in the face of the tragedy of life, and Providence seems to break down at the same time.

In the struggle between good and evil the bad succeed and are happy, while the good lose and are miserable. In other cases, the struggle may bring ruin to the bad, but the good are dragged down with them, as in the general massacre that ends the play of *Hamlet*. Even the novels with happy endings, in which poetic justice predominates, provide us with plenty of instances where it fails. Pecksniff and Jonas are satisfactorily detected and disgraced, but Mrs. Gamp, for all we know to the contrary, never lost her genius for making herself comfortable at the expense of her patients, and her enjoyment of cucumbers and gin remained unimpaired to the end. Barnes Newcome—in Chesterton's phrase—had "the soul of a small dried pea," but nothing disturbed his complacency.

The pains of remorse may be very intense, but unfortunately they are often missing in the cases where they would be most appropriate. As Thackeray urges, although Becky had many painful facts to put up with after her exposure, the pain of a bad conscience was not one of them:

"It may, perhaps, have struck her that to have been honest and humble, to have done her duty, and to have marched straightforward on her way, would have brought her as near happiness as that path by

which she was striving to attain it. But . . . if ever Becky had these thoughts, she was accustomed to walk round them, and not look in. She eluded them, or despised them—or, at least, she was committed to the other path from which retreat was now impossible. And for my part I believe that remorse is the least active of all a man's moral senses—the very easiest to be deadened when awakened; and in some never awakened at all."

Kipling's opium smoker, settled down in *The Gate of a Hundred Sorrows*, points the same moral:

> "'I had a wife of sorts once,' he soliloquizes. 'They say she died because I took to the smoke. . . . . But it's so long ago—thousands of years ago—that it doesn't matter; . . . nothing matters when you're on the smoke, except the smoke . . . I'm quite happy; not drunk happy, you know; but always quiet and soothed and contented.'"

His last hope was that he might die with a pipeful of good stuff between his lips. As to what would happen next, well, it didn't matter. Nothing mattered if only that the keeper of the Gate would not go on mixing his black smoke with bran.

In the closing days of the Roman Republic, Sulla must have gone beyond most earlier records in the way of political assassinations. Yet he was uniformly successful and uniformly satisfied. That is why he called himself "*Sulla felix*," a term that implies not merely good luck, but the blessing of the gods. After making himself head of the state and reorganizing the constitution, he resigned his offices and lived several years in peaceful retirement, enjoying the respect of his contemporaries, and not least his own good opinion of himself.

Just as there are times when the wicked prosper, so there are times when on the whole the righteous are miserable. "If the saint is happy on the rack, either the saint must be a very great saint or else the rack must be a very bad rack."

Even so, there is no reason to discard poetic justice. The pleasures of the bad may be more intense at times than the pleasures of the good, but happiness goes deeper than pleasure. The good have a well-grounded satisfaction which they would not exchange. The philosopher, as somebody has said, may not be as jovial as a drunkard or as contented as a pig; but he prefers his own happiness to their's.

Still less need we discard providence. Providence can work, and does work, not merely in spite of tragedy, but in and through tragedy.

If you ask how, you find a suggestion in Kipling's *Children of the Zodiac:*

Once on a time some of the gods came down from the stars to help men. To do this they became men themselves, and thus they lost their immortality, and had to die when the call came to them from the great Houses of the Zodiac, the obedient ministers of the Power that rules all things.

One of the gods who came to earth was Leo. He was married, and his wife had come to earth with him, and their work was to make songs and sing them to teach men that they must be brave. When they had grown old together, Leo's wife died; then his own turn came, and he felt at his throat the touch of the Crab who ruled the House of the Zodiac to which Leo belonged. Leo protested. Why should he be called away just at the moment when he had begun to find out how much his songs helped to prevent men not to be afraid of death?

The Crab answered that perhaps that was just the reason; and he added that in any case there was one person who was still afraid of death—namely, Leo himself. His wife had been braver than he.

"'I forgot,' said Leo simply. 'The Girl was braver. But I am a God too, and I am not afraid.'

"'What is that to me?' said the Crab.

"Then Leo's speech was taken from him, and he lay still and dumb, watching Death till he died."

Work must be done whether the Universe is friendly or not. Men must aim at success, but neither for the sake of enjoying success; nor for the sake of other people's esteem, that is, for fame, "that last infirmity of noble mind"; nor, finally, for self-esteem which is the real "last infirmity" of minds, noble or ignoble as the case may be. If life were run on the lines of poetic justice, these rewards of work, which we find so sweet, would be habitually present; we should resent their absence; they would loom too large in the imagination; and our motives would be coloured by them. The tragedy of life provides the salt which is more necessary than the sugar. It is tragedy that develops character—so long as it is not the development of his character that the man has in view.

Tragedy on a world-wide scale is the theme of H. G. Wells' *War in the Air*—a piquant story in view of recent experiences. It describes the collapse of a rotten system of western civilization and western predominance.

Individuals—and this is one of the main points to notice—from the prince generalissimo of the Germans down to the vulgar little cockney who kills him in a sordid brawl, have less to do with the progress of events than they may think. It does not follow that all things are the sport of chance. On the contrary, it is the bad system itself that works out its own damnation and falls by its own weight. More truly, though Wells does not tell us so, providence lies behind the whole process, using men, and men's plans and efforts, as its instruments, but working to a great extent over and above their conscious co-operation, to bring about very different ends from the ends they aim at, hope for, or expect.

Tolstoy's *Peace and War* is the best known of the books that press the disparagement of the indi-

vidual to an extreme, setting aside altogether the part played in history by great personalities. It may serve, however, as an antidote to moderns who tend to go to the other extreme of maintaining that except through man's conscious co-operation providence is barred out from doing anything at all.

CHAPTER XII.

TWO FUNDAMENTALS OF RELIGION.

I.—THE PERSONALITY OF GOD.

WELLS, in his later phase, is one of the few novelists who has worked out a religious scheme of his own, and a scheme in which a personal God holds the centre of the stage.

Orthodoxy, he says in *Mr. Britling Sees it Through*, is wrong in speaking of God as omnipotent, omniscient, "omni-everything." That may be true of "the Veiled Being," the power behind all things; but of Him we know nothing certain. The God with Whom we have to do is a strictly limited God. Like us, He has to struggle and fight. He helps us, but we have to help Him. He is, moreover, a man-made God, actually created in some obscure sense by human thought.

The theory (or is it a new theory?) is worked out further in *Joan and Peter:*

> "'We don't want a preventive League of Nations,' said Peter. 'It's got to be creative or nothing. . . . A world-peace for its own sake is impossible. . . . The Old Experimenter would certainly put a spoke in that wheel. . . . He's a sort of God I have. . . . He doesn't rule the world or anything of that sort, because he doesn't want to, but he keeps on dropping new things into it. To see what happens. . . Inventive, restless men are the particular instruments of my Old Experimenter. . . And they won't *stand* a passive peace. . . . I have my doubts of all this talk of making the world safe for democracy. I want the world made one for the adventure of mankind, which is another story. . . I despise human history—because

I believe in God . . . . in my Old Experimenter. O! I don't understand Him; . . . He's just a figure for what I feel is the reality.' "

And again:

" . . . 'I thought of Him first . . . as the God of the Universe,' Peter explained.

" 'You couldn't love a God like that,' Joan remarked.

" 'Heavens, *no!* He's too vast, too incomprehensible. I love you—and Oswald—the R.F.C. and biology. But He's above and beyond that sort of thing.'

" 'Could you pray to Him?' asked Joan.

" 'Not to *Him*,' said Peter.

" 'I pray,' said Joan. 'Don't you?'

" 'And swear,' said Peter.

" 'One prays to something—it isn't one's self.'

" 'The fashion now-a-days is to speak of the God in the Heart and the God in the Universe.'

" 'Is it the same God?'

" 'Leave it at that,' said Peter. '*We* don't know. . . What need is there to know? In view of the little jobs we are doing. Let us leave it at that.' "

These theories may seem to us neither profound nor plausible. Even so, they deserve to be treated with respect. They are the gallant attempt of a man to get himself and his contemporaries out of the mess in which they find themselves.

They are theories again which have caught the attention of the minority who take these matters into account. It would be useless nowadays to try to exorcise the devil of doubt from the layman's mind by appealing to him in the name of Peter or Paul, of bishops, philosophers or theologians. "Wells, I know," the layman would answer, "Arnold Bennett I know, and Bernard Shaw; but who are ye?"

If our objections are to have a hearing, we must give the reasons for them. And after all, the

reasons are not far to seek. We must content ourselves here with suggesting one or two without any attempt to work them out at length.

To begin with, it is difficult to conceive of ourselves as completely devoted to a god whose power is so limited that in the long run he and his plans may be utterly defeated. Stevenson, in another of his parables, has a picture of the hero who, when the twilight of the gods is at hand, and when everybody has deserted them, hurries to their side to help them to defend the walls of Valhalla. That is magnificent; but it is not religion.

Next there is a criticism of Dr. Gore's, which seems very much to the point:

> "The God of Mr. Wells is a Person .... And He is a Person who has had His origin in time. He was a product of man's activity. Man's corporate effort after self-redemption—man's corporate self-consciousness—generated this personal God and brought Him into being. 'An immortal being arising out of man as external to the individual man.' 'A spontaneous and developing God arising out of those storms in our hearts and in the universe, and striving to overcome them.' ... But that man's corporate effort should generate a personal God, human and limited, but our God, seems as unthinkable as possible. Does every intense corporate striving generate its God? If so, besides the general human God whom Mr. Wells has discovered, we shall have a German God, a Trade Union God—ten thousand Gods. And we are back in mythology indeed!"

This notion of a god who is an emanation of human thought reminds one of the whisky, described in *Raymond*, formed from the emanations of decaying vegetable matter rising from the world to the spirit world on the other side. We should be as little inclined to worship Wells's god as we should be to drink Raymond's whisky.

II.—IMMORTALITY.

The hope of a future life is not prominent in modern fiction, and when it is mentioned it is often mentioned with some show of disapproval.

The idea seems to be that the hope of heaven is necessarily a selfish hope, or that, at any rate, it is more unselfish—more noble—to work without it than with it.

Writers who hold this view are often inconsistent. They treat the orthodox doctrine with "disrespectful attention," while they are quite solemn and deferential when it is presented under the patronage of spiritualism; others are fond of contrasting the religion of Christians with that of Buddhist monks, Hindoo fakirs, and Mahommedan dervishes, much to the advantage of the latter, although the Buddhist and the Hindoo have a lively hope of a future, even if that future consists in annihilation, while the dervish looks forward to a Paradise the pleasures of which, to a large extent, are confessedly sensual and materialistic. The inconsistency is partly to be explained on the lines suggested by Dean Inge, who points out how some people take a positive pride in being "honorary members of all religions—except their own."

In the next place, a hope is not the same thing as a motive, and a Christian knows that if he works for the sake of a reward in the ordinary sense of the word, he will not get the reward. He knows further that the future life is essentially an unselfish life—a life in which "no one will work for money, and no one will work for fame, but each for the joy of the working," and for love of "the Master of all good workmen." It follows that the hope of a state which is the diametrical opposite of selfishness cannot in the nature of the case be a selfish hope.

Concrete instances make it sufficiently plain that character is not made ignoble but more noble by the

hope of a future of the Christian kind. A few such instances are provided for us in fiction.

Thackeray's account of Colonel Newcome's death is one of the best known:—

> "He lifted up his head a little, and quickly said, 'adsum!' and fell back. It was the word we used at school when names were called, and lo, he, whose heart was that of a little child, had answered to his name, and stood in the presence of the Master . . . He had been drawn to the bosom of the eternal pity."

Colonel Newcome died in an alms house, after years of poverty, but it would be an impertinence to pity him. His serenity and confidence were proof against disappointment, and they were habitual with him, not the sudden fancies of a dying man. No unsophisticated reader would suggest that he would have been a better man if he had been without the hope that he held so strongly.

There is one more point to be added: Colonel Newcome and men who believe as he did, in a future life are not thinking merely, or mainly, of their own future; they are thinking of others as well and of human life as a whole. And it certainly seems that we have a nobler view of men if we can be reasonably sure that the universe is not constituted in such a way that its best elements, love, friendship, self-sacrifice, and adventure, are at the same time the weakest and the most transitory. The future life holds out, not just the promise of a personal reward to this man or that, but the fact of human goodness itself, made permanent and perfect.

CHAPTER XIII.

AGNOSTICISM AND PESSIMISM.

I.—A MATTER OF CHRONOLOGY.

So far we have not needed to draw attention to any marked differences between Victorian and contemporary writers, but, at this point, the differences become important. Hence we get the question of chronology. How and where are we to draw the line between the two periods?

For many reasons the year 1887 is a useful date to keep in mind.

In the first place, it was the year of the Queen's first Jubilee, and although it was not marked by any other outstanding event, yet the decade in which it occurs has a good claim to be called the period of transition. To be precise, between the years 1885—1895, the last of the greater prophets of the old order, Tennyson, Browning, Newman, and Ruskin, all of whom had been held in high honour for some fifty years, died or ceased to write. During the same decade a new school of minor prophets, stars, as they seem to us, of lesser magnitude, appear above the horizon, many of whom are still alive. Translations, for instance, of Zola and Ibsen, and the realistic novels of George Moore, Hardy's *Tess*, and Meredith's marriage problem novels were published; while the first novels of E. F. Benson, Anthony Hope, H. Ward, Wells, and Rudyard Kipling, and the plays of Bernard Shaw and Pinero, saw the light. Galsworthy and Bennett were a little later.

Incidentally, there is another point that makes this decade memorable. It so happens that since Shakespeare's time the transitions between the main literary periods have fallen about the same time in

each century, and further that they have coincided with other events of critical importance.

Thus Shakespeare himself began to write just after 1588, the year of the Armada.

The Revolution of 1688 occurs during the transition from the Elizabethan period to the period of "Classical" prose or "the age of common sense." Bunyan died in that year; Milton had died in 1674; Dryden was flourishing, the acknowledged representative of the new era.

The French Revolution of 1789 stimulated the Romantic Revival. Gibbon had just published his *Decline and Fall*; and he and Burke represent the high water mark of the classical prose. At the same time, Gibbon's imaginative grasp of history, Burke's passion for causes, and the first publications of Blake and Burns anticipate the age of romance.

A hundred years later, as we have said, the Victorian Era ends.

The Queen's Accession in 1837, half way through the period, constitutes a sort of half way house. Coleridge, Keats, Shelley, Byron and Walter Scott (in 1834) had died, and Wordsworth had done his best work.

They belong to the first great group of romantic writers. Then, during the thirties we get the first works of Carlyle, Tennyson, Browning, Dickens and Macaulay. Ruskin, and the other great Victorian novelists, follow a few years later.

II.—THE VICTORIAN ATTITUDE.

1. A partial agnosticism, concerned with religion rather than with morals, existed from the beginning of the Victorian period, and exists now. Bentham, G. Lewes, Mill, Spencer and Huxley were among its earlier exponents. It was closely connected with the progress of natural science. Natural science in itself is not antagonistic to religion, but various philosophical theories put forward in its name left

no logical room either for the orthodox creed or the orthodox morality. Fortunately, however, the holders of these theories were inconsistent with themselves, and went on preaching the old moral beliefs with the old moral fervour. Mill's psychological hedonism did not prevent him earning the title given him by Gladstone of "the saint of rationalism"; similarly, Huxley's naturalism which makes men "conscious automata," and which gives their volition no power over their actions, does not prevent Huxley urging that it is a man's "plain duty" to try "to leave the world a little wiser and a little happier" than he finds it,—though it is not easy to see what duty can have to do with an automaton or an automaton with duty. We may add that many of these writers shared the comfortable belief of the dominant party in the steady and inevitable progress of civilization, a progress based on education, natural science, and industrial organization.

But, on the whole, in the Victorian period this agnosticism did not become widely prominent in popular thought; it was respectable to be orthodox; and there is little in Dickens, G. Eliot, Thackeray, Charlotte Bronte, and the novelists in general, to offend any one's susceptibilities.

Then, about the nineties, the philosophic naturalism represented by Huxley, Mill and Spencer, became more or less obsolete in philosophic circles—largely under the influence of Green and the Cairds. Popular thought, however, is generally a generation or two out of date, and the old theories with their old inconsistencies—just when they were vanishing from the study—began to extend their influence, as the Rationalistic Press publications bear witness.

The novelists follow the popular tendency.

In Conan Doyle's admirable story, *The Tragedy of the Korosko*, written in his unregenerate days before he became a spiritualist, the moral tone is as wholesome as one could wish. He sympathizes, too, quite impartially, with all the beliefs, religious or

anti-religious, of his characters, with the C. of E. colonel, with the nonconformist minister, with the evangelical Americans. But he makes it fairly clear that he does not share these beliefs, ranging himself with the agnostic Frenchman, who, much to his annoyance, finds that the honour of his country makes it necessary to die for a creed that is not his own. In spite of its geniality, the burden of the book seems to lie in the passage where the little life of man is compared to the lichen on the face of a granite cliff.

In Sir Harry Johnston's new novel, *The Man who did the Right Thing*, dealing with missions and missionaries in Africa, we find, perhaps, the same harking back to this Victorian attitude, combined with something of Conan Doyle's kindly tolerance for an outworn faith.

Referring to two missionaries in particular he says:

> "They wished to preach nothing but 'Christ crucified' and the new life which black men and white men should lead after 'accepting of' this sacrifice, this atonement for the presumed sinfulness of poor, martyred humanity. But despite this broad, if illogical, basis of their propaganda, they were afflicted with a bitter dislike of science, which they concentrated on the theory of Evolution, or on any Biblical criticism which would weaken their faith in a very manlike God who apparently turned his back on his own universe to concern himself solely and very fussily, very ineffectively, with one of its grains of dust, a tiny planet circling round a fifth-rate star among a billion other stars. For the rest, they had infinite courage, infinite love and charity, immense powers of work, but no sense of humour."

III.—THE POST-VICTORIAN ATTITUDE,

The agnosticism of to-day has gone beyond the Victorian type, although, as we have said, that type still survives.

To begin with, it is more thoroughgoing. It throws doubt, not only as Huxley did, on religion in general and Christianity in particular, but on the fundamentals of morality and on the purpose and value of human life. We notice, incidentally, that, as a rule, it is no longer based on the exploded theories of naturalism, and that it is not connected consciously with any definite philosophical system at all.

In the second place, it is marked by a strong tendency to pessimism, a pessimism of a deeper kind than we meet with in Victorian times. We naturally expect to find that life should seem dull when the sense of purpose has evaporated, and what we expect to find we do find, as the examples we give later on will show.

Thirdly, it has made a considerable difference in the prevalent attitude to the problems of sex. To this point also we come back later on.

It would be very difficult, though, fortunately, it is not necessary, to estimate how far this agnosticism extends; but the fact that it does extend very widely is generally admitted. The popular writers of our day, with some few exceptions, have no very clear or consistent message. Our line is to get on with our work without troubling about the why and the whither—to get on somehow, somewhere, and to let fundamentals alone. There are exceptions as we have said; men like Wells and Chesterton have a message; but no one would say that they have the train of disciples who glittered in the orbits of Carlyle or Browning or Ruskin. Men have been disillusioned about the old belief in the inevitable progress of civilization. The advance of education, of national prosperity, and of science, does not fulfil its early promise. The very fact that there were so many great preachers among the Victorians whose sermons seem to us out of date, has made us chary of committing ourselves to the preachers of to-day.

In conclusion, we may content ourselves with a

bare mention of two points which should be taken into account on the other side.

First, judging from the society described in, say, *Vanity Fair*, moral and religious convictions, if they were not openly discarded or disparaged, were not held in any very effective sense. The decay of conventional belief does not necessarily mean the decay of real belief.

Secondly, in our own times there is probably an increase of enthusiasm for social causes, and that enthusiasm is all to the good, even if men show a very slight grasp of the moral and religious principles on which such enthusiasm is based.

Hardy's *Tess* (1891) is a typical novel of the late Victorian, realistic school, and is one of the earliest and the best known. The pessimism of the book is explicit and complete. The world is essentially godless and essentially evil. All things are ruled by chance, or, more accurately, they are not ruled at all. But—and here there is a curious inconsistency like that of Fitzgerald's *Omar*—the writer seems to cultivate a grievance on the ground that the world—which has no ruler—is ruled so badly —by a God who does not exist. Hence, when the plot is played out, and the heroine has been brought to the gallows and duly hanged, we get the famous conclusion in which the moral of the book is epitomized:

> "Justice was done and the President of the immortals in Aeschylean phrase had ended his sport with Tess."

And again in another connection:

> "Birth seemed to Tess an ordeal of degrading personal compulsion whose gratuitousness nothing in the result seemed to justify and at best could only palliate."
>
> "It is strange," says Mr. Mair in his book on English Literature, "to find pessimism in a

romantic setting; strange too to find a paganism which is so little capable of light or joy."

Arnold Bennett's *Old Wives Tales* is perhaps the supreme example in recent times of this hopeless heathenism. It traces the careers of two sisters from childhood to old age and death. The characters in the book are for the most part quite ordinary people and their circumstances are ordinary circumstances; they are meant apparently to express the writer's verdict on ordinary life. We note a marked absence of any sort of strenuously held idealism, moral or religious. We note again that there is no centre round which the events revolve: no climax, except death, to which they lead. The point of the story lies in the fact that it hasn't got a point; that there is no point in anything—no plot—no centre—no goal. The purposeless careers of these people of the Five Towns represent the devastating purposelessness of human existence as a whole.

Here are two passages from the concluding chapters of the story, the headings of which occur in the book itself:

(End of Sophia).

"'Yet a little while,' she thought 'and I shall be lying on a bed like that! And what shall I have lived for? What is the meaning of it?' The riddle of life itself was killing her, and she seemed to drown in a sea of inexpressible sorrow. . . . . To be young and seductive, to be able to kindle a man's eye—that seemed the one thing desirable.

"'My life has been too terrible'; she thought, 'I wish I was dead. I have been through too much. It is monstrous, and I cannot stand it. I do not wish to die, but I wish I was dead.'"

(End of Constance).

"(Cyril's) behaviour caused his mother to revert in meditation, again and again, to the futility of Sophia's career, and the waste of her attributes.

She had grown old and hard in joyless years in order to amass this money which Cyril would spend coldly and ungratefully . . . . Headstrong Sophia had deceived her mother, and for the deception had paid with thirty years of melancholy and the entire frustration of her proper destiny.

". . . . (Constance pitied Sophia). She never pitied herself. She did not consider that Fate had treated her very badly. She was not very discontented with herself. . . . The invincible commonsense of a sound nature prevented her, in her best moments, from feebly dissolving in self-pity. She had lived in honesty and kindliness for a fair number of years, and she had tasted triumphant hours . . . . She possessed, after all, a certain amount of quiet self-conceit. There existed nobody to whom she would 'knuckle down.' . . .

"She had many dissatisfactions. But she rose superior to them. When she surveyed her life, and life in general, she would think with a sort of tart, but not sour cheerfulness: '*Well, that is what life is!*'

"The one matter in which she had gravely to reproach herself was her indulgent spoiling of Cyril after the death of Samuel Povey. But the end of her reproaches always was: 'I expect I should do the same again! And probably it wouldn't have made any difference if I hadn't spoiled him.'"

To Shakespeare's Macbeth life was full of sound and fury; to Constance and Sophia it was, on the whole, a placid, if rather a muddy, stream; but to them and to Macbeth alike it signified nothing. We have reached the absolute darkness in which there is no light at all. That, intentionally or otherwise, is the impression which this very modern book seems to convey.

Various society novels suggest the same sense of purposelessness among the well-to-do.

Dodo, already mentioned, has a special interest because it was the first of its type, and made a sensation when it came out in 1893. Burke in a famous passage (criticized in what ought to be a still more famous passage of Newman's) said of Marie Antoinette's circle that "vice lost half its evil by losing all its grossness." It would be truer to say that vice becomes doubly vicious when it is set off by wit, high spirits, and refinement; *Dodo* will bear this assertion out. Sonia's set in Stephen McKenna's recent book illustrates the same point. She and her friends, as Masefield says of Shakespeare's characters, "never forget that they are animals"; but unlike Shakespeare's characters they habitually allow both others and themselves "to forget that they are divine."

Neither Benson, however, nor McKenna write as though Dodo or Sonia represent either the whole of society or society as a whole.

A distinguishing mark of Anthony Hope's gentlemanly and romantic heroes consists in a strain of thoughtful philosophic melancholy, like that of the writer of Ecclesiastes. They recognize the existence of moral laws, but they will not make the recognition unreservedly either in theory or in practice. Laws, they seem to say, may be laws, but we will not be brought under the power of any of them. Morality, as Lord Melbourne remarked of religion, must not "obtrude" itself into the sphere of ordinary life. Consequently, they never feel themselves quite at home in the universe; they display the melancholy of a divided allegiance.

In the *Dolly Dialogues*, published about the same time as *Dodo*, we get the melancholy without the romance, and the book has been proclaimed as a true picture of the tone of certain sections of modern society. We can imagine the characters saying with Shakespeare's Prince Henry, "thus we play the fools with the time; while the spirits of the wise sit in the clouds and mock us." Only, unlike the

Prince, they cannot bring themselves to do anything else but play the fool.

In *The King's Mirror* the romance and the melancholy are combined. The young king has some real attachment to high principles, and, what is more, he means more or less to act on them; but if he were asked why, you feel that he could only say "for the life of me I don't know." He has the Stoic's loneliness without the Stoic's conviction of self-sufficiency. He has no assurance that there is anything in the nature of things to back up his principles or himself. But he has an instinct which he can't explain, and he will act on it; he must leave it at that. In the following passage he reflects on the pith of his tutor's lessons given him when he was a boy:

> "'Shall I summarize it,' he says, 'and say the greatness of a station, even as of a man, stands not in the multitude of things that it possesses. The summary is cold and colourless; it smacks of duty, of obligations unwillingly remembered, of selfish pleasures reluctantly forgone . . . . There has been in my family, here and there, a vein of fancy or of mysticism, turning sometimes to religious fervour, again sometimes to soldierly enthusiasm and a knight-errantry in arms, the ruin and despair of cool statesmanship. . . . . I would not be a monk or a Bayard, but would serve humanity, holding my throne a naked trust, whence all but I might reap benefit, whereon I must sit burdened with the sorrows of all; and thus to be burdened was my joy. . . . there must be a vacant space about the throne.'"

So, again, after his marriage to the woman he did not love:

> "... 'Alone I made my way back ..., I had a fancy to walk thus through the decorated streets; ... alone to tell myself that the stocking must be kept over the graze, and that the asking of

sympathy was the betrayal of my soul's confidence to me; alone to be weak, alone to be strong; alone to determine to do my own work with my own life, alone to hope that I must not render too wretched the life of another.' "

Then lastly, the conclusion of the whole matter:

" . . . In this real life the stage-manager takes no pains to have all things in harmony, nor to lead us through gradual and well-attempted emotions to the climax of exalted feeling, nor to banish from our sight all that jars and clashes with the pathos of the piece. Rather he works by contrasts. . . . by surprises, careless how many of the audience follow his mind, not heeding dissatisfaction or pleasure, recking nothing whether we applauded or damn his play."

It is only right to add that, according to a few critics, the pessimism of some at least of the Victorians is as deep as any that we find to-day.

There are passages, for instance, in *Vanity Fair*, which match with that just quoted from *The King's Mirror:*

" As the Manager of the Performance sits before the curtain on the boards, and looks into the Fair, a feeling of profound melancholy comes over him in his survey of the bustling place . . . . Yes, this is Vanity Fair: not a moral place, certainly, nor a merry one, though very noisy. . . . An episode of humour or kindness touches him and amuses him here and there; . . . but the general impression is one more melancholy than mirthful.

" (Amelia's) life . . . had come down to this—to a mean prison, and a long ignoble bondage . . . .

" The hidden and awful Wisdom which apportions the destinies of mankind is pleased so to humiliate and cast down the tender, good, and wise; and to set up the selfish, the foolish, or the wicked. Oh, be humble, my brother, in your prosperity! . . . Think what right have you to be scorn-

ful, whose virtue is a deficiency of temptation, whose success may be a chance, whose rank may be an ancestor's accident, whose prosperity is very likely a satire."

A similar view has been taken of George Eliot. She makes, it is said,

"A pitying study of man in the frame of mind of one who is determined to make the best of a bad business . . . Something may be done to elevate life and a good deal to alleviate it; and though not a little amusement can be extracted from it, yet no power can really transfigure it, and the more modest the aim, the less serious will be the inevitable disappointment"—*(Chambers Enc. of Engl. Lit.)*.

On the whole, however, these criticisms seem unjust. The happiness of George Eliot's finest characters is neither unreal nor superficial. Thackeray is not a cheerful writer, but if he had been a pessimist, he could never have been the creator of Colonel Newcome. The Victorians were preachers; that is a point of vital importance, and it makes a huge difference between them and their successors. They did not think the world was a very moral place; but they did think men were worth preaching to, and they did think their own ideals were worth preaching about. Anthony Hope's king had his ideals too; but it took him all his time to act on them; he had not the heart to preach them, and he had no belief that anyone would listen if he did. He had to plough his lonely furrow by himself.

The fact, however, ought to be emphasised that religious belief may be a remarkably inoperative belief. In a novel called *The Ragged Trowsered Philanthropists*, written before the war by a journeyman painter, and true at that time of the lives of the less skilled labourers, the only person who has any ideals, and any enthusiasm for his ideals, is a socialist and a sceptic. The unclouded conviction

of the existence of God possessed by his fellow workmen is even more ineffective than that of St. James' devils, who, as he says, "believe—and tremble"; whereas in this book the poor devils of painters believe without being made the least uncomfortable. Their orthodoxy neither gives them a high moral standard nor makes them any more careful to live up even to the low standards they possess. Still less does it produce in them any inclination to pray or to worship.

CHAPTER XIV.

SEX AND REALISM.

THE word Realism is generally used of descriptions that are not merely true to life (all good writing aims at being that), but of descriptions which deal both truly and fully with life in all its aspects, and especially in its uglier and grosser aspects.

With regard to the application of realism to marriage and sexual problems in general, the revolt from the Victorian standards has gone far, as the reports of divorce court proceedings bear ample witness. An approach has been made to the outspokenness of Fielding and the later Elizabethan dramatists. To some extent this candour and its popularity is pornographic, but it is not always and necessarily so. Licence in print and conversation does not always mean licence in practice; vice brought to light may be vice made less insidious.

Zola and Ibsen, before the nineties, as we have already said, stimulated the realism as well as the agnosticism and pessimism that we find in post-Victorian literature. We may mention in particular Zola's *La Debacle*, dealing from a fatalistic pseudo-scientific standpoint with the Franco-German War; also the famous trilogy, *Lourdes*, *Rome* and *Paris*, dealing with another downfall, that of a French priest's faith, and with what the writer regards as the imminent collapse of the Roman Catholic Church itself.

George Moore's *Mummer's Wife* belongs to the same decade, and has been described as the greatest of the English novels of the realistic school. In another of his books a novelist defends the aims of realism:

"We do not always choose what you call unpleasant subjects, but we do try to get to the roots of things; and the basis of life being material rather than spiritual, the analyst sooner or later finds himself invariably handling what this sentimental age calls coarse. . . . . The novel, if it be anything, is contemporary history, an exact and complete reproduction of the social surroundings of the age in which we live.

"Seen from afar," writes the same author, "all things in nature are of equal worth; and the meanest things, when viewed with the eyes of God, are raised to heights of tragic awe which conventionality would limit to the deaths of kings and patriots."

It is quite possible to handle what is offensive without either commending it, or condoning it, and without taking up a position of artistic neutrality. Thackeray shows how:

"In writing *Catherine* he sets out to paint vice as a thing,

'Of such hideous mien,
As to be hated needs but to be seen.'

"And he did this without using one jot of the horrible details of the narrative as they appear in the Newgate Calendar, while he leaves an impression of horror which far transcends the original" *(Chambers' Enc. of Engl. Lit.)*.

A great writer may be coarse, and unjustifiably coarse, without making us sympathize with his coarseness. But the realist, in Moore's sense of the word, holding that all things in nature are of equal worth, puts right and wrong, virtue and vice, on the same level, and leaves no room for moral attraction and moral indignation. Moral indifference takes their place. If, further, he believes that the basis of things is material, he tends to pessimism, and may end in what is worse than pessimism, in taking

the side of the flesh against the spirit, since the former is more fundamental.

Mallock, in his novel *A Human Document*, has some sound remarks on the dangers of realism:

> "'If a book is to interest,' said the doctor, 'it must excite sympathy; and human nature happens to be physiologically such, that those sympathies which the Christians are accustomed to call our lowest, are those which respond most readily to the least skilful literary stimulus. It is a sign therefore of weak art to appeal to them, since they are excited so easily; and it is bad morality to appeal to them, since they are excited so unmanageably.'
>
> "'Yes,' said the Englishman, 'and it is also bad science, since it is difficult to appeal to them . . . without exciting them disproportionately to the real importance of their subject.'"

And again:

> "I believe that in novels written for grown-up people all sides of life should be treated with equal fairness; but the human imagination is so constituted that six lines written about certain things will impress us as distinctly as six pages written about others. The French school we are talking of wholly forget this, and although they may not give more words to man's lower nature than to his higher, they produce on the mind a far more vivid impression of it. That is the artistic badness. The moral badness is this—that the impression thus produced is not only disproportionate, but it tends to corrupt the judgment long before it has appealed to it."

Meredith did as much as anyone to introduce the discussion of marriage problems into English fiction, and there are some subtle criticisms on his line of thought in one of the sketches by "Wayfarer," which came out in the *Church Times* and were published afterwards in book form:

"'I don't call that man a Christian,' said Harrison, emphatically, and slammed the book down upon his knee.

"It was to Mr. Meredith, the author of the book, to whom Harrison referred, and the Wayfarer was about to tell him to mind his own business—what had he to do with the author's private opinions?—when another thought suggested itself. 'A writer whom you read quite voluntarily or not at all does not become your debtor. No one is obliged to read Miss Corelli's works, and, therefore, Miss Corelli is nobody's business; it would be an impertinence to discuss her. But as Mr. Meredith compels me to read him, and the task is no easy one, he owes me something—himself to wit. He is my business. Perhaps, therefore, he is also Harrison's business.'

"Harrison went on. 'Look here: the girl had got what she wanted, and what she married Lord Ormont for, and she might have behaved herself decently.'

"'But, my dear sir,' I cried, 'don't you know that she is a creature of quite superior passions?'

"He looked at me queerly and said, 'That's just about it. This man makes it out that if you are that sort, whatever you do is all right. . . . Passion indeed!' and he seemed to become inarticulate.

"(Then the Wayfarer soliloquizes.) 'Fascinating as the world is of Mr. Meredith's creating, I am compelled to ask whether it is a wholesome world in which to spend a holiday. Is passion, frank, gorgeous passion, with a big share of the animal in it, good material for building character? Or to put it better: How shall this material be used, if it lie to hand, in building? Shall it be used lightly in the upper stories, in arches . . . in vaulted roofs to defy all weathers, in the stairway that leads to the upper air and to the stars? Or shall it be rammed hard down, with hot lime

of law, slaked in rain of tears, to make the hidden concrete of the foundations? Mr. Meredith does not hang in doubt. . . . Passion must have its own laws. It must have free course, and be glorified. To repress passion is to lose the good of life: to lack passion is to miss the point of life.'

"No, Mr. Meredith, I am sorry to be personal, but much as I enjoy your company, I do not call you a Christian."

And again:

"Mr. Stopford Brooke has spoken of Browning in connection with 'the reaction of the last few years of the nineteenth century against the tyranny of maxims and conventions in society, in morals, in religion.' I am not in the least disposed to regard Robert Browning as the poet of any such reaction, . . . as the prophet of revolt against maxims and conventions. Rather is he the prophet who lays bare the seaminess of the revolt. Passion? Yes, passion let loose and wasted, exhausted in a hundred lurid instances. Passion restrained, endured, and (then you get a really solid result):—

. . . a paradox
That comforts while it mocks,
Shall life succeed in that it seems to fail."

The claims of chastity are constantly urged without prior consideration of the principles on which they are based.

The following passage contains an attempt to get at these principles:

"The modern man . . . can be moved to abhor what leads to frightful disease and the torture of the innocent. But if these are avoided he cannot exactly see why natural appetites should not be satisfied. . . . The new generation will give little heed to traditional precepts . . . (And now comes the point.)

"Deep within the soul is an instinct, which may

be developed into an insight, that the satisfaction of the sexual appetite should be accompanied by trust and love, and that it is degrading otherwise. The sex-impulse is intertwined with affection and admiration. It demands a simulation of these if the reality is lacking, and so may produce a hypocrisy of love, which is a very horrible thing. Subordinate to general devotion of soul to soul—that is, practically in marriage—sex is lawful and good. Love only can properly control and sanctify sex. The ultimate cure for sexual vice is the development of human nature, so that men and women will have the insight as to the place of sex, and of themselves know and do the right."—(Lady Leconfield: *The Commonwealth,* June, 1921.)

CHAPTER XV.

CHRISTIANITY AND THE CHURCH.

It is never easy to sum up what a new chapter is about, and in this case the difficulty is acute. It might seem natural to say that, after discussing subjects of general moral and religious interest, we were going on to deal with Christianity and the Church.

But for reasons similar to those we have brought up in another connection, the broad-minded man, whether he is a Christian, or a Churchman, or neither, will agree that between these subjects there is no sharp line of separation. Christianity is not a mere addition to our beliefs in God and moral goodness; it includes them; it supports and strengthens them; it is the religion in which they find their fulfilment.

We shall avoid the difficulty if we say simply that we are dealing with the way in which Christianity and the Church are connected with our moral and religious beliefs in general.

The subject, in spite of its interest and importance, will be treated shortly; partly because the majority of novelists, and nearly all those of the first rank, have very little to say about it; partly because a good deal that might be said has been said already. The fact is, that in speaking about the influence of religion, it is usually the Christian religion which the novelists to whom we have referred have had in mind—so far, that is, as religion has appealed to them in an effective sense.

I.—CHRISTIANITY AND THE INCARNATION.

Shorthouse's *John Inglesant* (1881) is one of the few religious novels, orthodox or otherwise, that has a claim to immortality. It fails, perhaps, as some-

one has said, to stand the supreme test of style—the test of being read aloud; and it is full of heavy philosophical discussions that remind one of G. Eliot at her worst, or of Charles Kingsley in *Hypatia*. But it abounds with passages and episodes in which there is a fervour of faith magnificently phrased. Malvolti's vision of Christ is an example. Forgiven by Inglesant, whose brother he has murdered, he has become a friar, and in his turn he forgives his own chief enemy. How and why? Because in a life of devotion to the poor he has found Christ, or Christ has found him.

"It is in episodes that John Inglesant lives. When he faces the mob from the scaffold; when he faces the devil in the pavilion on the way to Pistoia and shows that 'it is not easy to ruin him with whom the pressure of Christ's hand yet lingers in the palm'; . . . . when he rides down the pass of the Apennines in the morning light, and, meeting his brother's long-sought murderer, lays his vengeance and his sword alike upon the altar of the mountain chapel; these are memories for a lifetime. Yet all must yield, as I think, to that vision of the blind Malvolti on the Capitol. I have stood on the Campidoglio by Castor and Pollux, and all history faded; Marcus Aurelius, burly on his big war horse, became a shadow; the wolves in their den below ceased from their restlessness; I forgot the rough, vulgar Franciscans who guard the shrine of the Holy Babe; I saw only that gracious figure of the Christmas midnight, and my lips began silently to frame the sentences: 'He came down the steps of the Ara Coeli': I was not fretted by the little topographical blunder; 'He came down the steps into the Campidoglio'—and I continued to the end: 'Among ten thousand times ten thousand I should know Him, and amid the tumult of a universe I should hear the faintest whisper of His voice.'"—(THE WAYFARER.)

Mrs. Humphrey Ward's *Robert Ellesmere* was the book of the season in 1888. It described how a clever and scholarly clergyman was reduced to an uneasy silence, and was led at last to the surrender of his faith, by the massive erudition of his friend the squire. This erudition we have to take on trust. We are not told much of what the squire said or of what the clergyman replied. The impression is given that he said very little, for the simple reason that there was so little to say.

The book serves to mark an epoch. Giants fought and the world hung, breathless with interest, round the ring. An uneasy silence was the last of its characteristics. Controversy penetrated every section of society, and the advocates on both sides were positively garrulous.

It is an epoch to which we look back with some degree of envy. Fashionable crowds were being thrilled by the austere sermons of Wilkinson, and Sunday by Sunday, in St. Paul's, you could "watch the saintly face of Dean Church and listen to the ringing tones of Liddon." The preachers to-day, so one is sometimes inclined to think, who draw the biggest crowds are men of a very different weight and metal.

Certainly there is no comparison between the interest aroused by religious discussion now and then. Wells is probably a better novelist and has a better philosophical equipment than Mrs. Ward, but whether because we are tired and suspicious of the subject or for some other reason few people would claim that he or his message is taken half so seriously.

Yet we have all moved with the times, and if we had to sit at the feet of the past generation, we should probably find a great deal in its claims that failed to make any appeal to us, and a great deal that was positively distasteful. The old philosopher was right: "Say not, What is the cause that the

former times were better than these? For thou dost not inquire wisely concerning this."

In our own century Winston Churchill's *Inside of the Cup* is a more considerable production than *Robert Ellesmere*. It is refreshing to come across some sort of intimacy with authorities, to have names, for instance, such as that of Sanday, brought into the lists. On the whole, however, the case for orthodoxy goes by default, and we may say the same of Fogazzaro's *The Saint*, representing Roman Catholic Modernism. In all these books most of the zeal and nearly all the learning is on the side of the revolutionaries.

II.—CHRISTIANITY AND THE CHURCH.

Walter Scott, unlike the majority of the Victorians who succeeded him, felt the human interest of the passionate beliefs displayed by sectarians in their special tenets—sectarians who made so large a part of the history of the times about which he wrote.

No one gives us more animated pictures of the fanatical Scotch covenanters and of English Parliamentarians than we find in *Old Mortality* and *Woodstock*. No one makes it clearer that this fanaticism has a strength which is rarely present in any generalised religious feeling, but only in a particular religion, and in a religion that is embodied in some definite society or denomination. If he did not understand Catholicism he did at least make people see that it was romantic and picturesque; and he not only popularized the romantic revival, but prepared the way for the Catholic revival that followed it.

Charles Kingsley's books, unless you cultivate the art of skipping, are spoiled by his hectic hatred of Rome. Don So-and-So "crossed himself; he was a good Catholic, and feared the devil"—this is not an unfair specimen of Kingsley's general attitude.

But the descriptions he gives of sayings and doings of his Church of England heroes shows how much

real piety there could be in Elizabethan England, or rather, in Charles Kingsley's own England, even among people who might have boasted of themselves as altogether anti-Catholic and anti-ecclesiastical.

A few other writers may be mentioned shortly. George Macdonald was a power once, and he deserves to be read still. His books give a good idea of the powerful hold the Presbyterian Church had on Scotland about the middle of the last century, and also of the dangers of its rigid Calvinism. It was a time when the "dæmonological nursemaid" existed, of whom Wells and other writers make so much, with her talk of hell and of an angry god who sends bad children there.

Harold Frederic's *Illumination* we have mentioned already. It gives a realistic picture of the seamy side of Protestant denominational life in America, with its professional debt-raisers and its ministers, subject to the autocracy of the chief butcher, the chief baker, and the rest of the commercial magnates by whom the chapels are supported. It is, unfortunately, a picture the truth of which is not confined to America alone.

As to the English Church it is badly off for books that show any adequate appreciation of a priest's life and a priest's work. E. F. Benson, if anyone, should possess this knowledge; but most of the ecclesiastics he describes are ineffective and worse than ineffective.

Arthur Morrison's *Child of the Jago* has a slight, but attractive portrait of a slum priest. It is a delightfully gloomy book in which all the characters begin bad, grow worse, and finish off very bad.

Even Kipling fails in what is otherwise one of the best of slum stories, *Badalia Herodsfoot*. Kipling has been through many transmigrations. He has identified himself with an Esquimaux medicine man and a Buddhist sunnyasi, with an American millionaire and a Dogger Bank fisherman, with Kaa the python and Bagheera the black panther; he has died

of opium in the Gate of a Hundred Sorrows, and in the body of Badalia he has fought with beasts in Drunkards' Row; but one thing he has not done, and that is to enter into the mind of a priest among his people. The nearest he gets to the mark is in the School Chaplain of *Stalky and Co.* When he deals with school life he knows perhaps from experience something of what the Padre is made for.

It is in the pot-boiling melodramas of Guy Thorne, with their contempt for anything like a literary style, that we find an appreciative familiarity with the working of the Church and the meaning of its Catholicity. The knowledge is there. One wishes it a better setting.

Rose Macaulay's *Potterism* should be added to the list, for although it is distinctly adverse to the Church's claims, it does show knowledge of what these claims are. The following quotation is condensed, and includes a few comments. It describes the psychology of a confession with extraordinary skill and sympathy:

> "'Please,' she said, 'will you hear my confession?'
>
> "'I'm very sorry,' I told her, 'but I can't. I'm still in Deacon's orders.'
>
> "... Hadn't she a regular confessor, I wondered, a regular director, or was it her first confession she wanted to make? I began something about the Vicar being always glad.... But she stopped me.
>
> "'No, please, it must be you.... Well, if you can't hear my confession, may I tell you something in private, and get your advice?'
>
> "... We went into the vestry."

(Probably they did nothing of the kind; even for an informal confession or consultation of this sort the open Church would have been used—for obvious reasons.)

> "It occurred to me that she was, quite un-

consciously, posing a little . . . so many women have this touch of melodrama, this sense of a situation. . . . I was simultaneously analysing her, and wanting to be of what service I could.

"'This is quite private, isn't it?' she said. 'As private as if . . .?'

"'Quite,' I told her."

(This is a doubtful point. The seal of a real confession cannot be broken, even in a law court; but in an informal confession it is open to doubt whether a pledge of secrecy ought to be given, and whether, if it were given, it would be absolutely binding. It would be as binding as any promise made in every-day life to respect a person's confidence—no less and no more.)

"'You know,' she said . . . 'what people are saying . . about Oliver Hobart's death. . . . Well, it wasn't Mr. Gideon.'

"'You know that?' I said quickly.

"'Yes,' she whispered, 'I know it. . . . Because I know—I know—who did it. . . .'

"I said nothing, but waited.

"'Do you want to tell me any more?' I asked presently.

"'Oh, I do, I do. But it's so difficult. . . . Oh, God . . . it was I that killed him.'

"'Yes?' I said, after a moment, gently, and without apparent surprise. One learns in parish work not to start, however much one may be startled. I merely added a legitimate inquiry. 'Why was that?'

"She gulped. 'I want to tell you everything. I want to.'

"I was sure she did. She had reached the familiar pouring out stage. It was obviously going to be a relief to her to spread herself on the subject. I am pretty used to being told everything, and at times a good deal more, and have learned to discount much of it. I looked

away from her, and prepared to listen, and to give my mind to sifting, if I could, the fact from the fancy in her story. This is a special art, and one which all parsons do well to learn. I have heard my Vicar on the subject of women's confessions.

"'Women—women. Some of them will invent any crime . . . merely to make themselves interesting. Poor things, they don't realize how tedious sin is . . .'"

And so on through four more pages of dialogue, and then at the end:

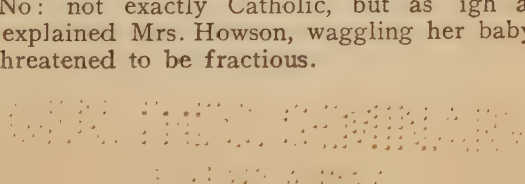
"'You've got to tell the truth,' I said. . . . 'Now it's easy. . . . No, I beg your pardon, it's not easy; I know that. It's very hard. But there it is: it's got to be done, and done at once . . .'

"It must have been ten minutes before I wrung out of her a faltering, but definite, 'I'll do it.'"

There are a hundred readers of Dr. Chandler's books on mystical theology, for one who has heard of his racy story of Blackwall streets and people, *Joe the Giant Killer*. Yet of all his books it deserves to be held not least in honour. The gravedigger and the porter are used by Shakespeare to bring out by way of contrast the meditations of Hamlet and the gloomy horror of Macbeth. So in this story there is a vein of pure gold—of pathos and religious intensity—that shines all the brighter against the squalor, the vulgarity, and the humour of its setting. The chapter about the Requiem in the slum Church brings out something of the astringent force of the Christian message mediated through the greatest of its services and the greatest of its hymns.

"'This is a Cartholic Church, ain't it?' queried Mrs. Jones, looking round with a sniff of Protestant disapproval.

"'No: not exactly Catholic, but as 'igh as 'igh,' explained Mrs. Howson, waggling her baby, who threatened to be fractious.



"'Indeed,' returned Mrs. Jones, in a dubious voice. 'I don't know as I've ever seen the minister what's here now.'

"'He's a saucy boy; yes he is, bless 'is little 'eart!' ejaculated Mrs. Jones, referring, it need hardly be said, to her offspring, and not to her spiritual pastor.

"Mrs. Jones smiled sympathetically, then resumed: 'Last time I popped in, was when your daughter was took, ma'am,' turning to Mrs. Cooper on her left. 'I mind the day, as my sister was buried that same afternoon, and in the same grave too; first my sister Jane, then your Eliza on the top of her.'

"'Then let me tell you, ma'am, that your sister is lying under a sincere Christian,' said Mrs. Cooper, shaking her head lugubriously. 'A happy release it was, though, poor dear, after all she'd gone through.'

"'Armenians, wasn't it?'

"'Partly Armenians it was; but principally her husband. He did carry on something cruel till he fell down a ship's hold and was dead before they could get him to the hospital.'

"'Serve him right, too,' commented Mrs. Howson.

"'Yes,' said Mrs. Jones; 'as I often say, the Almighty's slow, but he's sure. Folk often think that they've given him the slip, but he gets his own back in the end.'

"Meanwhile the Epistle had been read, and now the choir was singing the 'Dies Irae.' For the moment the attention of that crowd of idle sightseers was arrested and enthralled, and their feelings purified by the pity and terror of that stupendous hymn, in which the Christian consciousness has once for all painted human sin and divine justice face to face:—

'Day of wrath, O day of mourning,
See fulfilled the prophet's warning,
Heaven and earth in ashes burning.

Wondrous sound the trumpet flingeth,
Through earth's sepulchres it ringeth,
All before the throne it bringeth.

King of Majesty tremendous,
Who dost free salvation send us,
Fount of pity, then befriend us.'

"Jim Saunders was there, Socialist, would-be Labour member, and a friend of the Vicar's; he had been hard hit of late, and now it was his brother that was being buried. There was no one to be trusted now. But then his eye caught the figure of the Vicar up in the chancel. Was he a humbug too, like the rest, as some people said every parson must be? And then the disbelief in persons became disbelief in causes. Progress! Reform! Lifting up the masses! What was the good of doing anything for men who were nine-tenths animal already, and were doing their best to animalise the remaining tenth? If the animal life was all, why not be an animal like the rest? But was the animal life all? Apparently the hymn thought not.

'Ah! That day of tears and mourning!
From the dust of earth returning.
Man for judgment must prepare him;
Spare, O God, in mercy spare him.'

"Was that so? Was there that destiny for every soul? Christianity said so. The Vicar believed it. Was it true? And here the hymn, having just gathered itself up into that great cry in which the archangel's summons and the sinner's agony of terror were merged and blended, suddenly sank down into the breathless whisper of a tired child, and died away with an almost inaudible sob of intercession:—

'Lord, all pitying, Jesu blest,
Grant them Thine eternal rest.'

"'Makes you feel solemn-like, don't it?' said Mrs. Jones, under cover of the Gospel which was now being read.

"'It do,' said Mrs. Cooper; 'we none of us know whose turn'll come next. It's here to-day and gone to-morrow, and nobody seems to care.' And tears stole down her furrowed cheeks.

"'And him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out,' read the gospeller from the altar steps."

The Roman Catholics are better provided for than the Church of England. O'Sheenan describes Irish life delightfully, especially in *My New Curate*. *Luke Delmege* has considerable psychological power; it is a study of the same kind of self-centredness, the same obsession for admiration, that we had in *Illumination*, but in this case the process of deterioration is stopped in time. In both books a disproportionately rose-coloured view of things is conspicuously absent.

René Bazin's French novels are all good, and most of them have been translated.

R. H. Benson's novels are largely propaganda, direct and unblushing. We can plead guilty to many of his criticisms without accepting his conclusions. But his books contain much more than propaganda, and in any case we can carry off a good deal of his honey to our own hive—if we do not find it there already.

The ecclesiastical institutional side of Christianity is a vital part of it—that is the point, or one of the points, which his novels bring out well. *The Lord of the World* is, perhaps, the most powerful. It describes the civilization of the future, and the possibility of a vast progress in material prosperity, scientific discovery, and even in a refinement of manners and morals, which nevertheless leave the

world essentially soulless and unsatisfactory. Purple passages abound, especially in the last chapter. The final assault is made on the persecuted remnant of the Church by the protagonist of the new age. Then comes the end: "The Lord of the World," "the piteous prince of rebels and the exile of eternity," just at the moment of his triumph, is caught away to meet his Judge.

III.—CONCLUSION.

Men who honestly wish to accept the faith are kept back by the fact that it has so little hold on their generation. The novelists, it seems to them, bear witness to this fact, If they do not openly disparage Christianity, they leave it on one side. Christianity does not interest them. It has been tried and found wanting.

The conclusion is plausible, but it does not follow.

In the first place, a writer can only describe what he sees, and inability to see a thing does not prove the thing is not there. We have shown already how many great writers fail to see the devotion to great causes, the living saints and heroes, existing before their eyes. There is nothing surprising in the fact that they are unable to judge rightly of the power and nature of the Christian faith.

Secondly, even if a writer sees a thing, it does not follow that he has the vocation or the power to describe it, still less to do it justice. Shakespeare himself, according to Ruskin, could not draw a hero. Tennyson in his *Idylls of the King* tried to describe a hero and a saint combined in the person of King Arthur, and the attempt was a failure. He threw the portraits of himself, of Prince Consort, and of other luminaries of the Victorian Court into the oven of his imagination, and there came out this prig.

Lastly, there is the very natural tendency to revolt against bodies of men who claim to exercise some sort of control over our thoughts. It is bad enough to have our actions controlled; still, we are used

to that; such control is inevitable, and we acquiesce in it. But to be told what we must think and not think seems a much bigger interference with our liberty. Now all the Christian denominations make such claims. They may not claim infallibility, but they claim to speak with authority, an authority that is real, even when its limits are not defined. Here we get a contradiction. In religion, in spite of the tendency to revolt, the average man expects and respects this claim to authority. He presses it further than his teachers do. He forgets that the truth lies in a *nuance*. He wants a plain Yes or No to every problem he puts to them. Often he respects authority most when it presses on him least. That is why so many Englishmen and so many English novelists often speak very favourably of the Church of Rome, though without any intention of belonging to it or of studying its principles. Thus respect and resentment exist side by side or alternately in the same man's mind. Even in the ages of faith the faithful enjoyed criticizing their priests and throwing stones at their idols.

The tendency, therefore, to leave Christianity on one side, noticeable as it is in the novels, is not conclusive evidence against either its truth, its value, or its influence.

CHAPTER XVI.

SUPPLEMENT.

In this supplement we deal in the main with three books published in 1922.

In them and in recent novels in general (including *Joan and Peter* and *Peradventure*) we find no suggestion either of a really fresh philosophical system, or of any system, old or new, that may serve as a satisfactory substitute for the "outworn creeds of a bygone age." But we do find certain features which, though not new, are more prominent and more emphasised than they were in the past. They are referred to in the article on English Literature in the second of the last three volumes of the *Encyclopædia Britannica*.

(a). The sexual interest, as we might expect from the growing popularity of psycho-analysis, has become more pronounced. "*Galsworthy's Dark Flower* and *Beyond* are almost entirely taken up with the analysis of sex attraction. Wells and Shaw are strangely intent upon the life-force (cf. *Back to Methuselah*); and with C. Mackenzie, W. L. George, D. H. Lawrence, and Gilbert Cannan, it becomes almost an obsession" *(Enc. Brit. ib.)*

(b). Then again, the way in which sexual subjects are treated has become increasingly frank. "The emancipation (for which the nineteenth century yearned) has been achieved with a lack of effort that was almost spontaneous in the 20th century." Keable's books are a case in point. We have hints of the emancipation in *Peradventure*, and it stares at us unblushingly in *Simon called Peter*. The latter book ends, it is true, with an act of self-sacrifice in which the woman refused to marry the man she has lived with, not for her own sake, but for his. The sacrifice is so deliberate and so

resolute that it might have come with a better grace a little earlier in the story. But, while we do justice to the moral, we do not forget that to reach it we have to walk through a sewer, and we doubt whether the price was worth paying. Mallock's warnings, quoted in a previous chapter, have been forgotten or ignored.

(c). Lastly, there is the pessimism of Galsworthy and other writers who, in this respect, follow the steps of Thomas Hardy. It is true that so far as Hardy himself is concerned he finds a strenuous champion in Mr. T. Seccombe:

> "Men and women are always snatching at happiness, striving to express and to fulfil themselves, and breaking themselves against a power that takes no heed of them . . . .Watching from infinity, (Hardy) shows human life as futile and trivial. But when individuality is intensified and desire exerted, as in the love of man and woman, then, despite the hostility or indifference of the ruling power, we see human life heroically grand. . . . . The charge of pessimism cannot stand" *(ib.)*

Yet to say that human life is mean and trivial, and that the governing power is indifferent, even to its occasional grandeur, seems as good a description of what is usually called pessimism as anything we have seen.

I.

In Robert Keable's *Peradventure* the religious and theological interest is dominant, a fact worth noticing in a book which, in an age that is supposed to be indifferent to such matters, ran through four editions in two months after its appearance. Ordinary writers give us the false contrasts between "dogma and religion," or between "religions of authority and religions of the spirit," as even H. Walpole does in the *Cathedral*; and has not a real theologian, M.

Sabatier, done the same? They reiterate the tags of popular controversy with the insistence of a monomaniac. It is refreshing to find a book which steers its course among parties and principles by the light of an intimate and first hand experience.

The characters, too, are life-like, with perhaps one exception—the evangelical clergyman, Paul Kestern's father. Kindly, affectionate, sincere, and not without dignity, he is at the same time a fanatic—a righteous mule. He closes the door on his son, who has lost his faith, has (worse still) cherished thoughts of becoming a Roman Catholic, and, extreme limit of degradation, has written a play, and has had it produced in a London theatre. In the father's eyes, Atheists, Roman Catholics and Actors are all indiscriminately and irrevocably damned.

So far as the clergy of the Church of England are concerned, the type is rare if not altogether mythological—there is no trace of it in the autobiographies of R. H. Benson or of R. Knox. But in fiction it flourishes, though not even *Peradventure* succeeds in making it plausible.

The attraction, however, felt by Paul for the definitely authoritarian claims of Catholics, Roman or Anglican—claims which he thinks necessary for a true religion, but which he is unable to accept; the unattractiveness of an ingloriously comprehensive religion which makes no claims at all; the clever, sympathetic, understanding talk of bishops, priests, dons, undergraduates and girls; the clash of opinions which leave him "down and out"—all these are realistically and faithfully dealt with.

The reasons these people give for their various views are not in themselves impressive, though the author makes them seem so by the old device of describing the impression they make on his characters. And, indeed, unless a writer is a George Eliot, it is hard to blame him for doing anything else. Adequate arguments would not be under-

stood, and would turn the novel into a treatise.

Yet the climax is disappointing. Paul, dreaming greatly, and inspired by Ursula, the girl he marries, works out a new religion, which turns the common clay of life into gold. But we feel that he tells us either too much or too little—too much to leave us incurious about his dreams, and too little to explain them. We are lost in a fog of phrases.

"'God is silent (Paul complains to Ursula), always silent. You were right; He must be asleep . . . And so all the light is gone out of life. Before, everything in the world seemed to have a secret joy behind it, and it was wonderful to feel part of a great plan, to be able to lend oneself to it and work for it . . . . It was wonderful to feel that Christ knew and was our Master and Friend. And He's gone. And with Him has gone all the light and joy in living.'

"Ursula stretched out her hand as they walked and broke off a spray of golden glory. She held it out to Paul, without a word. 'Lovely,' he said unthinkingly.

"'Oh, no,' she replied calmly. 'It's dull and ugly and useless. It's perfectly plain. . . . What is more, the leaves are already in decay.' . . . .

"'But it's God that matters,' he said, 'it's not the things themselves. And if God is not there, why then—'

"'Why then, the rose is still red to-day, as it was yesterday, and still sweet, sweet in its life and sweet in its death. And a new one is on the way . . . .Smell the scent of the rose, pick it, love it, worship it. Are you mad?'

"'God is silent,' he reiterated sullenly. . . .

"'Let the priest and the philosopher go their own ways. It's their vocation; perhaps they must, poor souls. Meanwhile, the beauty of the world is beyond argument. . . . God! Oh, I know

nothing of God. Perhaps He is not, perhaps He is. The God they talk about, anyway, is not here. But the earth is here; . . . . Beauty is here, and beauty is enough for you to sing and me to paint, all our days . . . .'

(So Paul was convinced.) "'Oh,' he said, 'I see, I see,' (and a little later) 'I know what I am now,' he said, 'I'm the blind beggar-man. One thing I know: once I was blind, but now I see.'"

On this theme of the blind beggar-man, Paul writes his play, and the play is an immense success. It opens other people's eyes, as his own eyes have been opened, and his friends are enthusiastic:

"'You've got to preach that new religion of yours,' said Muriel; 'I hope you realize that.' And she went on to explain to the sceptic of the party what the new religion is.) 'This creed,' she said, 'doesn't seek an æsthetic hybrid sensual beauty. . . . It is a gospel that origins and ends don't matter, . . . that God is veiled, but the veil is good; . . . that the urge of life within us is our guide; . . . And,' she added slowly, 'the true spiritual life consists in the pursuit of learning, experience and beauty, according to vocation, without fear and for themselves alone.'"

Swinburne and, curiously enough, Browning provide the author with quotations to endorse or adorn his moral. Swinburne's lines serve as a sort of Easter Anthem of the new faith—as a pæan of triumph over our deliverance from bondage to God and our arrival in the Land of Promise:

"Cry out, for his kingdom is shaken; cry out, for the people blaspheme;
Cry aloud till his godhead awaken; what doth he to sleep and to dream?
Is not this the great God of your sires, that with souls and with bodies was fed,

And the world was on flame with his fires? O
fools, he was God, and is dead."

Browning's lines urge that it is a man's vocation to walk by whatever light has been given him, as Paul felt he had to do. But it is not in the slightest degree likely that Browning would have felt himself at home in this galley, with Paul, Ursula, or Swinburne. In *Easter Day* he gives us an Anthem of his own, in which, from similar conditions he draws a very different conclusion. The doubter (into whose mouth the poem is put) recounts how he was brought face to face with God, and was judged. To his astonishment, the Judge tells him, as Ursula told Paul, that though he leaves God out of account, he can still have the world to study, to love, and to worship. And, like Paul, he accepts the offer with unbounded delight. Unlike Paul, however, he finds he has miscalculated. "Life is done," said the Judge,

"Time ends, Eternity's begun,
And thou art judged for evermore."

He looked up, all seemed as before.... Then the voice went on:

"This world,
This finite life, thou hast preferred,
In disbelief of God's plain word,
To heaven and to infinity....

"Thou art shut
Out of the heaven of spirit; glut
Thy sense upon the world: 'tis thine
For ever—take it!"

"How? Is mine,
The world? (I cried, while my soul broke
Out in a transport.) Hast thou spoke
Plainly in that? Earth's exquisite
Treasures of wonder and delight,
For me?"

The austere voice returned—

"So soon made happy? Hadst thou learned
What God accounteth happiness,
Thou wouldst not find it hard to guess
What hell may be his punishment
For those who doubt if God invent
Better than they."

Man and nature, so Browning seems to teach, viewed as objects of loyalty apart from God are not meant to give us any true satisfaction. We may disagree with Coleridge who said, "Nature is not a goddess in petticoats, but the devil in a strait waistcoat"; yet nature—mountains, trees, flowers, "golden glory," "the good brown clay,"—are at best impersonal, inhuman, subhuman; they are idols, which, like all idols, degrade their worshippers. And as a general rule, the devotees of beauty affirm implicity what explicitly they deny. They are thinking all the time of a power behind nature, of a personal power, superior to themselves. Blake, for instance (as Prof. Webb points out in his Gifford Lectures), in spite of his passionate heterodoxy and his passionate self-confidence, regarded his "prophetic books" as written at the dictation of his "friends in Eternity." *Peradventure* lays stress, as we have seen, on Paul's vocation; but you cannot extract a vocation out of a Universe that is not the expression of, and dependent on a personal being.

II.

Hugh Walpole's *Mr. Perrin and Mr. Trail* has been mentioned in a previous chapter. In the *Cathedral* the same author dwells with the same unction on the mean and sordid side of life, shown this time, not among the masters of a school but among the clergy and laity of the country town of Polchester. If the majority of the characters are abnormally objectionable, yet, as in the pre-

vious novel, we do not feel that the author is putting good for evil or evil for good. On the contrary, evil is intended to be repellent, and, in spite of *Peradventure*, it is repellent just because it is antipathetic to the love of God which lies behind the mutual detestation of Archdeacon Brandon, Canon Ronder, and three-quarters of the actors in this unlovely story. The Bishop (who stands for the claims of sanity and sanctity) sizes up the situation:—

> "'You have allowed this thought of him (Canon Ronder) to become an obsession to you. All of us have known that time when everything has suddenly turned against us—our work, those whom we love, our health, even our belief in God Himself. Once I lost, as it seemed, completely all my faith in God. I came out of that believing only in the beauty of Christ's life, clinging to that, and saying to myself, Such a friend have I—then life is not all lost to me;—and slowly, gradually I came back into touch with Him and knew Him as I had never known Him before, and, through Him, once again, God the Father . . . The love of God continues and, through Jesus Christ, the love of men.'"

Without the love of God the glories of the world pass like the splendour of a sunset. With it man is strong, like the old Bishop whose frail and tired body serves as the veil of an indomitable love and of a hope that can never be put to confusion. This is finely put in the account of his last sermon:

> "The old man slowly disentangled himself from his throne, and then slowly, slowly, slowly advanced down the choir. At the sight of (him), all the brief history of the world was suddenly apparent. Greater than Alexander, more beautiful than Helen of Troy, wiser than Gamaliel, more powerful than Artaxerxes, (ever so much greater,

we may add, than the Pauls and Ursulas who, age by age, invent for us their new religions), he made the secret of his immortal life visible to all."

III.

In Galsworthy's trilogy *The Forsyte Saga*, we drop back into the pessimism we discussed a chapter or two ago. Idealism is gently and firmly set aside, not, however, defiantly, but sadly, in the spirit of Ecclesiastes. We recall how Arnold Bennett holds up the last of his *Old Wives* for admiration, because with her thoroughly wholesome mind she died satisfied with things in general and with herself in particular. Had she not had a good time on the whole, moments of triumph even, with no need of "knuckling under" to anybody? There is a different atmosphere about the Forsyte Family. Read the last pages where Soames sits brooding over pictures of the past—of the wife whom he loved, but who never loved him, and had left him, as "she sat looking into space with the eyes of a dying bird"; of Fleur, his only daughter, who, through family quarrels, missed her chance, married the wrong man, and was miserable; of the patriarch of the family who had just died, and of his house 'To Let.'

"'To Let'—the Forsyte age and way of life, when a man owned his soul, his investments, and his woman, without check or question. And now the State had, or would have, his investments, his woman had herself, and God knew who had his soul. 'To Let'—that sane and simple creed!

"The waters of change were foaming in, carrying the promise of new forms only when their destructive flood should have passed its full . . . . Athwart the Victorian dykes the waters were rolling on property, manners, and morals . . . . And sitting there, ... Soames—like a figure of Investment—

refused their restless sound. Instinctively he would not fight them—there was in him too much primeval wisdom, of Man the possessive animal. They would quiet down when they had fulfilled their tidal fever of dispossessing and destroying; . . . they would lapse and ebb, and fresh forms would rise based on an instinct older than the fever of change—the instinct of Home. . . .

"Deep down he knew that change was only the interval of death between two forms of life, destruction necessary to make room for fresher property. What though the board was up, and cosiness to let?—someone would come along and take it again some day.

"And only one thing really troubled him, sitting there—the melancholy craving of his heart. . . .

"He might wish and wish and never get it—the beauty and loving in the world!"

There is a curious likeness between these last pages of the *Forsyte Saga* and a passage in H. Walpole's *Cathedral;* it is a likeness not only between the sentiments, and between the circumstances by which the sentiments are aroused, but between the phrases in which the sentiments are expressed. At the same time the likeness brings into relief the difference of their conclusions. The *Cathedral* provides some sort of antidote to the pessimism of those moderns of whom Mr. Galsworthy is a representative.

"I fancy that any fellow-citizen of mine will agree with me that the Jubilee summer of 1897 was the last manifestation in our town . . . of the old spirit that had dwelt in its streets and informed its walls and roofs for hundreds of years past . . . ."

"An interesting and, to one reader at least, a pathetic history might be written of the decline and death of that same spirit not in Polchester only, but in many another small English town.

From the Boer War of 1899 to the Great War of 1914 stretches that destructive period; the agents of that destruction, the new moneyed classes, the telephone, the telegram, the motor, and last of all the cinema.

"Destruction? That is perhaps too strong a word. We know that that is simply the stepping stone from one stage to another of the eternal, the immortal cycle.

(In Polchester) "throughout the nineteenth century that spirit (the old spirit of the cosy seventeenth and eighteenth centuries) lingers, gently repulsing the outside world, reproving new doctrine, repressing new movement . . . and the Rock and the Cathedral wait their hours, watching the great sea that, far on the horizon, is bathing its dykes and flooding the distant fields, knowing that the waves are rising higher and higher, and will at last, with full volume, leap upon those little pastures, those green clad valleys, those tiny hills. And in that day only the Cathedral and the Rock will stand out above the flood."

Both writers speak or hint of the end of an age which familiarity has made comfortable and cosy; of the flood of time which buries every age in turn; of the wish for the personal possession and for the permanence of Property; and of the wish for the beautiful and the lovable. The *Saga*, in response to the first wish, gives us the symbol of the House "to let," of a property which remains, while those who possess it change; and in response to the second wish—a blank. In the other book we get the Rock and the Cathedral, and the eternal reality to which they bear witness, and in which all the needs, if not all the wishes, of men find their ultimate satisfaction.

A NOTE.

TWO RECENT HISTORIES.

The Modern Commonwealth by Ramsey Muir and G. Trevelyan's *Nineteenth Century* hold that the 'sixties (the years during which Palmerston died, and shortly following the publication of Darwin's *Origin of Species*) mark the end of the typical Victorian Era; not, as we argued in an earlier chapter, the decade round the first Jubilee of 1887.

The divergence of view, however, is perhaps more apparent than real. The 'sixties may have been the beginning of the change, but there is a good deal to be said for the decade round '87, as the one in which the change was most conspicuous and complete. Ramsay Muir himself lays stress on the fact that it was about this time that the effect of the Act of 1870, making education compulsory, began to make itself felt. The growth of a reading public led to the growth of newspapers; and, since the reading of newspapers is the primary source of an average Englishman's mental culture, we should expect that the development would have a marked influence on the intellectual outlook of all classes alike.

As a recent writer, one of the editors of *Enc. Britannica of* 1908, says:

> (As) "for the bulk of modern journalism, its conductors realize only too well that their business is to appeal to the masses, and to a standard of education and taste which falls far short of anything that can be called intellectual." (*Enc. Brit. Art "Newspapers."*)

We are living then in a journalistic age, and for this reason alone the decade round the First Jubilee

of 1887 is worthy of a place beside the 'sixties, and all the more so when we take into account what we have already mentioned, the deaths of so many of the eminent Victorians who had lived and worked through the whole reign, and the rise of so many of those popular writers, many of whom are still with us.

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